Philosophische Analyse
Philosophical Analysis

Herausgegeben von / Edited by
Herbert Hochberg · Rafael Hüntelmann · Christian Kanzian
Richard Schantz · Erwin Tegtmeier

Nicholas Rescher

Interpreting Philosophy
The Elements of Philosophical Hermeneutics

ontos verlag

Nicholas Rescher

Interpreting Philosophy

The Elements of Philosophical Hermeneutics

Philosophische Analyse
Philosophical Analysis

Herausgegeben von / Edited by

Herbert Hochberg • Rafael Hüntelmann • Christian Kanzian
Richard Schantz • Erwin Tegtmeier

Band 17 / Volume 17

Nicholas Rescher

Interpreting Philosophy

The Elements of Philosophical Hermeneutics

ontos
verlag

Frankfurt I Paris I Ebikon I Lancaster I New Brunswick

Bibliographic information published by Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliographie; detailed bibliographic data is available in the Internet at http://dnb.ddb.de

North and South America by
Transaction Books
Rutgers University
Piscataway, NJ 08854-8042
trans@transactionpub.com

United Kingdom, Eire, Iceland, Turkey, Malta, Portugal by
Gazelle Books Services Limited
White Cross Mills
Hightown
LANCASTER, LA1 4XS
sales@gazellebooks.co.uk

Livraison pour la France et la Belgique:
Librairie Philosophique J.Vrin
6, place de la Sorbonne; F-75005 PARIS
Tel. +33 (0)1 43 54 03 47; Fax +33 (0)1 43 54 48 18
www.vrin.fr

©2007 ontos verlag
P.O. Box 15 41, D-63133 Heusenstamm
www.ontosverlag.com

ISBN 978-3-938793-44-2

2007

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in retrieval systems or transmitted
in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, microfilming, recording or otherwise
without written permission from the Publisher, with the exception of any material supplied specifically for the
purpose of being entered and executed on a computer system, for exclusive use of the purchaser of the work

Printed on acid-free paper
FSC-certified (Forest Stewardship Council)
This hardcover binding meets the International Library standard

Printed in Germany
by buch bücher **dd ag**

INTERPRETING PHILOSOPHY (An Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics)

Contents

Preface

Chapter 1: THE PROJECT
On Philosophical Discourse and Its Interpretation 1

Chapter 2: THE PROCESS
Hermeneutical Methodology Examined 19

Chapter 3: THE CONTRAST
A Critique of Deconstructionism 31

Chapter 4: THE AGENDA
What Issues are to Figure in
Philosophical Deliberations? 43

Chapter 5: THE PERSONALIA
Referential Analysis in Philosophy 57

Chapter 6: THE TYPOLOGY
Elements of Philosophical Taxonomy 69

Chapter 7: THE ARGUMENTATION
What Substantiates the Fundamentals? 85

Chapter 8: THE TERMINOLOGY
The Problem of Defining One's Terms 101

Chapter 9: THE MESSAGE
On the Formative Role of Apories in
Philosophical Deliberation 123

Chapter 10: THE INTERCONNECTIONS
The Systemic Interlinkage of
Philosophical Issues 145

Chapter 11: THE LAWS
The Rational Requisites of Interpretive
Procedure 153

Chapter 12: THE PROSPECT
Philosophy at the Turn of the Century:
A Return to Systems 165

Index of Names 185

PREFACE

Metaphilosophy is philosophy's poor and neglected cousin. Philosophers are on the whole too busy doing philosophy to take time to stand back and consider reflectively how the project itself actually works. And they tend to produce texts without too much consideration of how this looks from the standpoint of the consumer. All this, it seems to me, affords good reason for attending to philosophical hermeneutics, reflecting on the issue of how philosophical texts are to be understood and interpreted.

I am grateful to Estelle Burris for her competent work in preparing this material for print.

Nicholas Rescher
Pittsburgh PA
December 2006

Chapter 1

THE PROJECT
Philosophical Discourse and Its Interpretation

1. THE AIM OF THE ENTERPRISE

Hermeneutics (from the Greek *hermeneuô* = to interpret) is the systematic study of texts—and philosophical texts in particular. And here it is clear that any sensible interpretation of a philosophical text must unfold against the background of an understanding of the situation of philosophy and the nature of the philosophical enterprise. Some understanding of the field itself is presupposed for any meaningful endeavor to interpret properly the texts that are supposed to fall into its domain.

Philosophy as traditionally conceived calls for using the resources of our information and reason to resolve, as best we can, the big questions regarding the nature of human beings and their place within the world's scheme of things. The history of philosophy consists in an ongoing intellectual struggle to comprehend the seemingly endless diversity and complexity that surrounds us on all sides. Aristotle was right on target when, in the first book of the *Metaphysics*, he said that "it is through wonder that men now begin and originally began to philosophize, wondering first about obvious perplexities, and then gradually proceeding to ask questions about the greater matters too, such as ... the root origin of it all."[1] Philosophy deals largely with *how* and *whether* and *why* questions: how the world's arrangements stand in their relation to us, whether things are as they seem, and why things should be as they are (for example, why it is that we should do "the ethically right" things). Ever since Socrates pestered his fellow Athenians with puzzling questions about "obvious" facts regarding truth, beauty, and justice, philosophers have probed for the reason why behind the reason why of things.

As part of this venture philosophy also deals with the method by which such inquiries are concluded. For what we seek are not just answers but rationally defensible and well-substantiated answers. Philosophy strives after

that systematic integration of human knowledge that the sciences initially promised to give us but have never managed to deliver because of their ongoing division of labor and never-ending pursuit of ever more specialized detail. Throughout philosophy one can never escape a concern for "the big picture".

Philosophy excludes no subject matter altogether. Its issues are too synoptic for the conscientious practitioner of the descriptive to rest content with any delimited range of preoccupation—no issue in the dominion of nature or in the province of human thought is in principle outside its sphere of interest and concern. Virtually *everything* is in some way relevant to its task of providing a sort of traveler's guidebook to the lay of the land in reality at large. Dealing with being and value in general—with possibility, actuality, significance, and worth—the concerns of philosophy are universal and all-embracing. The problem field of philosophy is as wide and borderless as is the domain of human knowledge itself. What makes an issue philosophical is not the topic but the mode of treatment and the point of view from which the topic is considered. Philosophizing represents the product of people's attempts to bring intelligible order into our often chaotic experience of the world.

2. THE METHOD OF PHILOSOPHY: TRUTH-ESTIMATIVE CONJECTURE

When philosophers pursue their mission of grappling with those traditional big questions regarding ourselves, the world, and our place within its scheme of things they standardly do so by means of what is perhaps best characterized as *rational conjecture*. This is a matter of achieving not with the best *possible* answer (in some rarified sense of this term), but with the best *available* answer—the putative optimum that one can manage to secure in the actually existing conditions in which we do and must conduct our epistemic labors. To be sure, rational conjecture is not to be a matter of *mere guesswork,* but one of *responsible estimation* in a strict sense of the term. It is not just some sort of estimate of the true answer that we want, but an estimate that is sensible and defensible—one to whose tenability we are prepared to commit ourselves. We have a need for more information than is strictly speaking in hand, but we certainly do not want to make it up out of thin air. The approach of philosophy to its problematic concerns is as a branch of rational inquiry—a process of deploying our speculative abilities to provide answers to our questions that are validatable through

cogent processes of evidence, inference, and the usual instruments of rational substantiation. However much speculation and conjecture may go into the process by which philosophers find their answers, evidence and argument must always underpin those answers where authentic *philosophizing* is at issue.

In interpreting philosophical texts we cannot ask for certainty with respect to the issues. Given the limitations of information and insight in this domain of inquiry we can expect no logically airtight *guarantee* that what is, as best we can tell here and now, the optimal available answer is actually true. Acknowledging the information transcendence at issue in philosophical truth estimation, we know that we cannot guarantee the truth of its product. (Indeed, if the history of human inquiry has taught us any one thing, it is that the best estimate of the truth that we can make at any stage of the cognitive game will all too frequently come to be seen, with the wisdom of eventual hindsight, as being well off the mark.) Inquiry in philosophy, as elsewhere, is a matter of doing no more—but also no less—than the best we can manage to realize in the prevailing epistemic circumstances. Nevertheless, the fact remains that what is, in the circumstances, the rationally indicated answer affords our most promising *estimate* of the true answer—in the sense of that one for whose acceptance as true the optimal overall case be constructed with the instruments at hand.

The need for such an estimative approach to philosophy is easy to see. One must not ask for too much. After all, we humans live in a world not of our making where we have to do the best we can with the means at our disposal. We must recognize that there is no prospect of assessing the truth—or presumptive truth—of claims in this domain independently of the use of our imperfect mechanisms of inquiry and systematization. We are not—and presumably will never be—in a position to stake a totally secure claim to the definitive truth regarding those great issues of philosophical interest. But we certainly can—and indeed must—do the best we can to achieve a reasonable *estimate* of the truth. We can and do *aim* at the truth in our inquiries even in circumstances where we cannot make failproof pretensions to its attainment. We have no alternative but to settle for the *best available estimate* of the truth of the matter—that estimate for which the best case can be made out according to the appropriate standards of rational cogency. And *systematization* in the context of the available background information is nothing other than the process for making out this rationally best case. Accordingly, it is rational conjecture based on systematic considerations that is the key method of philosophical inquiry, afford-

ing our best prospect for obtaining sensible answers to the questions that confront us.

The complexity and many-sidedness of the problems is such that there can be few—if any—hard and fast rules for their intelligent treatment. Human life and thought are so varied, so diversified, so many-sided in substance and interconnections that sensible discussions of the issues cannot be regimented by universalized specifications.

3. ARE THERE RULES FOR WRITING PHILOSOPHY?

To be sure, the articulation thought framework that pervades awareness to philosophical questions is subject to individual perception and concern. There are no hard and fast rules for writing philosophy any more than there are hard and fast rules for writing poetry or history. Every philosopher must come to his or her own terms not only in substantive matters but also in dealing with the expository problems of the field. No one approach is fitted for every writer or suitable for all issues. When addressing their concerns, individual philosophers must attune their expositions to their own perspectives—their own priorities and appraisals of the issues—and bear upon them.

But although there are no *rules,* there certainly are *guidelines*—general norms that one is well advised to follow because in flouting them, one opens the door to avoidable problems and difficulties. Such guidelines are no more than mere rules of thumb that the teachings of experience indicate as deserving of respect. But to violate them without good cause is to invite yet further problems in a domain already strewn with difficulties.

Throughout the present discussion these strictures must be borne in mind. Wherever the discussion proceeds on the language of rules it must be understood that rules of thumb are at issue. And all such rules have their exceptions. Each one can be violated for good and sufficient reason, but such violations are never cost free: each violation exacts some price, and one had best be sure that this is offset by some compensatory advantage. While the rules in this domain are mere guidelines and nothing hard and fast, one nevertheless violates them only at one’s peril. Effective communication about philosophical issues is difficult enough; there is no point in making it harder for oneself than it needs to be.

4. DESIDERATA IN PHILOSOPHICAL WRITING

AMPLITUDE

Immanuel Kant tells us (quoting the Abbé Terason) that from the reader's point of view many a book would be shorter if it were not so short—if it provided more explanations, examples, clarifications. But while this is true enough, the balance of danger goes the other way. By and large, the risk that the philosophical author will try the reader's patience with excessive explanations and detail is greater than that the reader will be left wishing for a fuller exposition. (In general this is something that only book reviewers ask for, and not people who actually have to pay for the book.) Readers usually do not resent the challenge of having to figure something out for themselves.

After all, it lies in the very nature of philosophy that not all the i's can be dotted and the t's crossed. In principle, every philosophical concept can be given further explanation, every philosophical thesis further substantiation. There is always more to be said. Each sentence can profitably use a commentary—and so can each sentence of that commentary. The answers we give to philosophical questions are always only rough and approximate. Our solutions to philosophical problems engender further problems. They are always open to challenges that require additional elaboration and refinement. In philosophy we are always impelled toward greater sophistication—our problem-solving distinctions always bring yet further distinctions. We are led to compound wheels upon wheels—adding further epicycles of complexity to the theories we are seeking to render acceptable. The writer who insists on completeness will wind up saying nothing.

To be sure, one need seldom concede that a philosophical doctrine as such is inadequate, but only that it's specific *formulation* in a particular state of the art is. The doctrine as a whole should be seen as a diachronic organism, something that develops and grows and changes over time, maintaining its identity not in its specific content but in its general orientation and, above all, in its genealogy—its exfoliative linkage to the core commitments from which it arose. A doctrinal position as such (i.e., in contrast to its specific formulation) is schematic, maintaining its identity through successive systemic formulations by its overall programmatic tendency rather than through its substantive detail.

We arrive at a model of philosophical development that is essentially exfoliative. Every philosophical position is linked to and developmentally

derived from a prior doctrine that contains its root idea. (In the realm of philosophical though as in physical nature we have *ex nihilo nihil*.) This exfoliative process involves a superengrafting of new distinctions upon old, with new topics and issues continually emerging from our efforts to resolve prior problems. There is an unending process of introducing further elaborative refinement into the setting of old, preestablished views, which sees an ongoing emergence of new positions to implement old doctrines. Thus, every philosophical concept and position always has a genealogy (an archeology, in currently fashionable terminology) that can trace back its origins programmatically through a means-end chain of problem solving. Every position and distinction has its natural place in the developmental tree.

No exposition of a philosophical position is ever long enough. Not theoretical adequacy but common sense alone can tell us when we have rendered a position of "enough said".

CLARITY

Philosophical positions are bound to be large, complex, elaborate structures. They do not neatly lend themselves to condensation, abbreviation, summarizing. All the same, the philosopher who does not have an accessible message—who does not present a compactly summarizable answer to an identifiable question—is asking for trouble. Philosophy must, in the end, be bound up with the problems and issues of life, with people's ventures at coming to intellectual and practical terms with themselves, their fellows, and the world. The philosophers whose deliberations cannot readily be brought into a discernible explanatory relationship with these issues run a real risk that people will consign their efforts to the storage shelves of material devoid of relevancy and interest. To address those whose interest is geared to the remote technicalities is to run a real risk of confining one's readership to this sparsely populated group. If one has something of value to say it is well worthwhile to make the effort to gain for it the widest practicable audience.

Our philosophical questions are always answered incompletely, in ways that inevitably leave further crucial detail to be supplied. In fact, in recent times philosophy has moved toward increasing technicality and sophistication. So much so that it makes interested bystanders impatient. They cry: Will philosophy ever again address the heavens? Will it contribute anything to man's vision, rather than merely clarifying it?[2] But this sort of

complaint overlooks the filiation of means and ends in question resolution that links the technical issues of philosophy to the fundamental presystemic questions from which they arise. We are (or should be!) driven to those technical micro-issues by the inexorable necessity of addressing them in order to secure rationally adequate resolutions of the presystemic macro-issues afforded by the "eternal problems" of philosophy.

A happy medium between over- and underexplaining has to be struck in philosophical writing as elsewhere. And here we must set out from the basic consideration that in philosophy nothing can be explained completely—all the way down. Enough must be said to remove ambiguities and possible misinterpretations. But the trouble with excessive detail is that it tends to lose sight of the issues and to introduce misleading emphases. (In this regard it is worth contrasting the essays of G. E. Moore with those of Bertrand Russell.) To be sure, the adequate treatment of technicalities is sometimes unavoidable, and technicalities require detail. The writer who does not use good judgment in this may soon lose those readers, however, once they become persuaded that the effort-to-return ratio for those technical elaborations is turning unfavorable.

After all, total clarity is never attainable in philosophy. The philosopher is caught in the bind created by two facts: (1) No concrete philosophical statement is ever adequate to the issues: every philosophical statement needs further commentary and explanation—more delineation and qualification. (2) No philosophical statement is altogether clear until its full explanation is provided. It is an inexorable consequence of these facts that we can never get clear but only clearer. The best one can do in philosophical matters is to provide what clarity suffices for our present purposes. It is easy to make errors here. Writers know (or *think* they know) what they want to say, but it is easy to misjudge how matters look from where the reader stands. Still, one does well to try for as much clarity as one can afford to obtain within the limits of the available space and time, for insofar as we are not clear, we defeat our own communicative purposes. Since we write to convey and convince, unclarity inevitably puts obstacles in the way of our aims.

Philosophy is, after all, a matter of publicly accessible inquiry. The basic problems with which philosophers deal are public property, so that the inquiries have to be conducted in the public domain by means of generally available conceptual resources. If thinkers did not see these doctrines and supporting arguments as public objects—communally available and appraisable—they would be doing something very different from philosophizin*g*.

Admittedly, clarity is not enough. But when other things are anything like equal, it is greatly preferable to its contrary. The writer who makes obscurity a trademark does well to have an unalloyed confidence in the quality of his work. In making their writings obscure philosophers take a step in the direction of condemning them to obscurity.

MAINTAINING TOUCH WITH A TRADITION

For all intents and purposes, philosophers fall into groupings that are internally united by an affinity of doctrinal fundamentals, but externally divided into distinct schools of thought and traditions. On the surface, it certainly seems to be a fact of life that there are always different schools of philosophical thought regarding the same issues—different approaches to resolving the same problems. Philosophers seem usually to belong to warring tribes. In antiquity we have Aristotelians and Platonists, Stoics and Epicureans; in the Middle Ages, Thomists and Augustinians and Scotists; in modern times Rationalists and Empiricists, and so on. Or so it seems. But various theorists have recently argued that these appearances are misleading. What seem to be conflicting philosophical doctrines are in fact—so they contend—totally separate positions that are actually incomparable or incommensurable. Such discordant positions—so these incommensurability theorists maintain—simply cannot be brought into contact with one another; they cannot be compared in point of agreement or contradiction because no common measure of comparison can be established between them. Different philosophers do not, in fact, form schools that hold divergent views on essentially the same issues—they actually share no issues and live in disjoint cognitive domains that share no common territory. Rival doctrinal positions are totally disconnected; different theories are incommensurable—they cannot be expressed in common units of thought. Adherents of different theories literally live in different thought worlds, among which contact—be it by way of disagreement or agreement—is simply impossible.

In the English-language orbit, the prime spokesman for such a view was R. G. Collingwood:

> If there were a permanent problem *P*, we could ask: What did Kant, or Leibniz, or Berkeley, think about *P*? and if that question could be answered, we could then go on to ask Was Kant, or Leibniz, or Berkeley, right in what he thought about *P*? But what is thought to be a permanent problem *P* is really a number of transitory problems, P_1, P_2, P_3, ... whose individual peculiarities

> are blurred by the historical myopia of the person who lumps them together under the name *P*.[3]

Various intellectual historians share this point of view, maintaining that every thinker stands alone—that every teaching is ultimately distinctive, every thesis so impregnated with the characteristic thought style of its proponent that no two thinkers ever discuss the same proposition.

On such a view, there just are no schools of thought constituted by different thinkers who share common commitments and no perennial issues treated in common by successive generations of theorists. Different thinkers occupy different thought worlds. Disagreement—indeed even comprehension—across doctrinal divides becomes impossible: the thought of every thinker stands apart in splendid isolation. Discordant philosophers can never be said to contribute to the same ongoing issues: "There are simply no perennial problems in philosophy: there are only individual answers to individual questions, with as many different answers as there are questions, and as many different questions as there are questioners."[4] Philosophers of different persuasions are separated from each other by an unbridgeable gulf of mutual incomprehension. So argue the theorists of doctrinal incommensurability.

The fact, however, is that this view exaggerates mutual incomprehension to the point of absurdity. Of course, incomprehension *can* and sometimes *does* occur across reaches of time or space when major conceptual dissimilarities are involved. But this is certainly not the case generally or necessarily.

There is, after all, no shortage of examples of problems and issues discussed by different philosophers working in different times and places. Protagorean relativism, Cartesian skepticism, and Berkeleyan phenomenalism are all issues that our contemporaries can identify and examine equally well as their inaugurators—and accept or reject in whole or in part as their own commitments would indicate. Philosophical concepts and issues can certainly be transposed from one systemic setting to another, despite any differences of nuance and attunement derived from their particular context of origin. Indeed even the very question that we are presently discussing (Can different philosophers debate the same issues?) is a clear-cut example of this commonality of issues, with, for example, Collingwood and Randall assuming essentially the same holistic position and the present discussion rejecting it—along with the entire doxographic tradition. To insist that deliberations about the nature and function of the law in St. Thomas Aquinas

are incommensurable with those in Kant is like saying that the Alps and the Rockies cannot both be mountain ranges because they are so different.

To deny the possibility of philosophical disagreement on grounds of incommensurability is to abandon the enterprise as a meaningful cognitive project from the very outset. Only if disagreement is possible does the enterprise make sense. Philosophical positions have a point only insofar as they *deny* something: *omnis affirmatio est negatio*. They claim truth by denying falsity; they assert saving insight by attacking dangerous error. To this end there must be contrasts. If one denies the very existence of rival positions and views them as literally *inconceivable*, there can be nothing substantial to one's own view. Where there is no opposition to attack, there is no position to defend. To see rival positions as incomprehensible is to demean and devalue one's own; if opposing positions were conceptually ungraspable in their very natures, there would be little use in taking a stance that precludes them. Where no possible rival position has the least plausibility, advocacy of a particular doctrine as the "appropriate" position becomes altogether pointless.

Without the prospect of shared problems and theses considered in common by diverse thinkers, all hope of interpretation and comprehension is lost. Every thinker—indeed each one of us—would be locked within the impenetrable walls of his own thought world. If one philosophical mind cannot connect with another, then *we* ourselves cannot connect with anyone either. In the absence of relatability to other times and places, the historian himself would be faced with issues that he is incapable of dealing with. If Kant cannot address Hume's problems, neither can Collingwood. If conceptual contact across the divide of conflicting beliefs were impossible, then, given the diversity of their views, all philosophers would be condemned to mutual incomprehension. Were it the case that, as a matter of principle, *X* would not come to grips with a rival theorist *Y* by way of agreement or disagreement, then we ourselves would be condemned to philosophical solipsism—unable to come to make a rational assessment of the ideas of any other thinker due to an inability to make conceptual contact. If philosophers cannot speak to one another, then they cannot speak to us either. Any prospect of communal discussion of shared issues is at once destroyed. If the conflicting views of philosophers cannot be brought into touch—if they indeed are strictly incommensurable, with each theory enclosed in a world of its own—then they become altogether inaccessible. We all become windowless Leibnizian monads—though bereft of the coordinative benefit of a preestablished harmony.

A dogmatic insistence on cognitive incommensurability is unprofitable and self-defeating. Contact of *some* sort among philosophical doctrines is essential. Determinists and indeterminists do not generally disagree about what causality is, but about its pervasiveness. Skeptics and cognitivists need not disagree about the idea of knowledge, but only about its availability. Statists and libertarians do not clash about what desires individuals have, but about the weight these should carry in public policy deliberations. All such controversies flow from agreement about the range of jurisdiction or desirability of certain factors with respect to whose *nature* there is little or no disagreement. If we cannot in principle relate the thought of distinct philosophers by way of identity and similarity, if we cannot say that here they are discussing the same (or similar) questions and that there they are offering consonant (or conflicting) answers, then we shall be in bad straits indeed. If we cannot relate *X*'s thought to *Y*'s, we cannot relate it to *ours* either. We are locked into mutual incomprehension. (And worse! After all, what makes for so great a difference between *X*'s understanding of *Y* and *X*'s understanding of the *X* of a year ago who also held rather different opinions? A cognitive solipsism of the present moment looms before us here.)

A crucial factor for interpretation lies in the fact that in writing philosophy one has no sensible alternative but to proceed on the supposition that others can understand us in the sense we intend—if they are willing to make a sufficient effort which we are well advised to make as undemanding as possible. And we do well to explain, develop, and substantiate our own position in terms of its relationships with the ideas and doctrines to which it is linked by way of affinity or opposition.

To be sure, this can be overdone. Philosophical writers frequently indulge negative explanations. Employing formulas such as "In saying thus I don't mean to maintain so", they are telling us about what they do *not* claim or believe or assert in a well-intentioned endeavor to head off misunderstanding. But they often seem insufficiently aware of how unproductive this can be. Guarding against misinterpretation is all very well, but the range of things one may *not* mean is usually so large that it is not particularly enlightening to be presented with a few items that can safely be stricken from the list. It is perhaps more painful for the author, but certainly more helpful to a reader, when writers take the *via positiva* and set out, plainly and explicitly, what they are prepared to assert. Authors who have not thought things through to the point of feeling comfortable about accentuating the positive have apparently not yet managed to develop their ideas to a point where they merit the exposure of publication.

HEEDING THE GUIDANCE OF LOGIC

Few features are more advantageous to a philosophical discussion than the maintenance of a logical order of exposition that renders the filiation of ideas and the relationship of theses as clear and conspicuous as possible.

But Descartes's fond vision to the contrary notwithstanding, the presentation of a philosophical position generally does not easily lend itself to the linear mode of exposition of pure mathematics, moving from axiomatic first principles to ever more complex derivative truths. The realm of fact and reality just does not have the neat sequential structure of written exposition. A philosophical exposition must be logical: it must present its ideas in a rational and coherent way. But this does not mean that it will exhibit a predestined sequential order, proceeding along an inexorable line of development from a starting point in unavoidable first principles. In giving an account of the nature of things, philosophers must impose a certain rational order on the materials at issue—exactly as with those who set out to provide an account of a city or of a country. And—within limits—they are free to do this in many different ways.

Moreover, philosophical problems frequently make demands of their own. Often they will not allow one to work in the way one would prefer, but insist that the discussion proceed in *their* way. And when this occurs, there is no use struggling against the inevitable.

A philosophical position, like a defended city, will have some sectors more weakly protected than others. The writer of philosophical deliberations can be quite sure that readers will probe for such weak spots—to say nothing of referees and reviewers. One is well advised to take preventive measures to bolster them in advance—enlisting the aid of friends and colleagues insofar as possible. No position is totally invulnerable to objection, but there is no point in making things more difficult for oneself than necessary. In philosophy, perhaps more than in any other mode of writing, criticism is a boon—provided it comes before rather than after publication. Of course, philosophical excellence is not a matter of tight reasoning alone—or even primarily. But loose thinking certainly does not advance its cause.

Philosophy does not furnish us with new ground-level facts; it endeavors to systematize, harmonize, and coordinate the old into coherent structures in whose terms we can meaningfully address our larger questions. The prime mover of philosophizing is the urge to systemic adequacy—to achieving consistency, coherence, and rational order within the framework of what we accept. Its work is a matter of the *disciplining* of our cognitive

commitments to make overall sense of them—to render them harmonious and coherent. Two prime injunctions regarding the mission of rational inquiry accordingly set the stage for sensible philosophizing:

1. Answer the questions! Say enough to satisfy your curiosity about things.

2. Keep your commitments consistent! Don't say so much that some of your contentions are in conflict with others.

To be sure, there is a tension between these two imperatives—between the factors of commitment and consistency. We find ourselves in the discomfiting situation of cognitive conflict, with different tendencies of thought pulling in divergent directions. The task is to make sense of our discordant cognitive commitments and to impart coherence and unity to them insofar as possible.

Note that a writer's claims do not wear their reasons for acceptance on their sleeves. Few and far between is the sentence able at one and the same time to state a claim and to present explicitly the reason for its acceptance—to make an assertion and at the same time to offer a reason for accepting it. After all, even a claim of the form "*P*—and moreover *Q*, which is the case—constitutes a good reason for accepting *P*" still leaves open the question: But why accept *Q*? Claims do not—nay, generally cannot—be self-validating in concurrently presenting the grounds for their own acceptance. What they achieve is not to *state* the grounds for their acceptability, but at best to *suggest* them to the perceptive reader.

And here, once again, the writer is well advised to be helpful to readers, for cogent legitimation is the requisite of philosophical adequacy. And where this is not forthcoming readers have no right to be satisfied and authors no right to ask for our acceptance/endorsement of the views at issue.

It is this aspect of philosophical exposition that marks the discipline as a venture in rational inquiry. No matter how pretty the story, or no matter how much it appeals to our imagination or our admiration—however much it enlists our approval—it can make no claims on our *understanding* save through the instrumentality of reason.

AVOIDING UNDUE TECHNICALITIES

Non-philosophers sometimes ask: Why is so much present-day philosophical writing boring and irrelevant? A substantial divide apparently separates the issues that intrigue philosophers themselves from those that non-philosophers think philosophers ought to discuss. The principal reason why the non-specialist obtains this impression is that contemporary philosophical writing is in great measure technical and addressed to the specialist alone. But why should this be? Is it perhaps simply a matter of the fashion of the day? By no means! There is good reason for it. Contemporary philosophers generally do—and surely always should—deal with technical issues in the field because they are *constrained* to do so. They address this technical issue to resolve another in order to resolve yet another and so on until finally one reaches what is needed to resolve some probably significant presystematic, nontechnical issue.

A thread of means-ends filiation should always link philosophical technicalities to the nontechnical big issues of life, the universe, and everything with which philosophy traditionally deals. Philosophical technicalities can be unavoidable means to sensible ends—and should, in fact, only be there when this is so. They matter when—but *only* when—they are required for the satisfactory handling of something nontechnical. Regrettably, however, people sometimes become entranced by technicalities for their own sake. They are unwilling to take the time and trouble to explain to their colleagues (let alone to laymen) why those technicalities matter, how they arise out of the fundamental issues of the field, and why they are needed to resolve problems satisfactorily. They talk—and want to talk—only with fellow specialists, fellow technicians whose concern for technical issues can be taken for granted. And then those complaints about irrelevancy will clearly be legitimate. The cardinal principle is that technicalities should be minimized: they should never be multiplied *praeter necessitatem* but only be resorted to insofar as necessary. It is true that technicalities may become unavoidable in the adequate treatment of philosophical issues, but it is no less true that they should never be deployed beyond the point where they indeed are unavoidably required.

A considerable host of philosophers from Hume to Russell and beyond show that it is possible to do both technical philosophy and popular communication—occasionally even in one and the same book. Unfortunately, too few philosophical writers are willing to make the effort.

AVOIDING HISTORICAL OVER-CAUTION

More than any other family of academic researchers, philosophers are constantly harking back to the work of their predecessors. They are imbued with the fear of being accused of reinventing the wheel or rediscovering the North Pole. But constantly looking back over one's shoulder is not only likely to give one a stiff neck, but it also makes it hard to be forward looking.

From Socrates onward, there are encouraging precedents for creative work in philosophy with only modest attention to the burdens of the past. And there is something to be said for such an approach. If we are too fearful of doing injustice to the past, we shall have to preoccupy ourselves with it to an extent that makes it hard to get one with the work of the present. If we become too heavily burdened with the freight of the books of bygone thinkers, we shall lack the time and the energy to think for ourselves. Unable to get on with our proper task, we shall become becalmed—with various colleagues and some entire university departments—in the sterile waters of ancestor worship.

The philosopher who is unduly afraid of making *wrong* claims, of making mistakes, is in grave difficulty through an excess of caution. But so is the philosopher who is overly afraid of making *anticipated* claims, of making repetitions. The former is condemned to skepticism, to saying nothing. The latter is condemned to retreating into history, to rehearsing what has been done to the detriment of creative innovation. He is in danger of joining those for whom, in Kant's words, "the history of philosophy becomes a substitute for philosophy itself".

Every generation must do its own philosophical work, must find its own answers to the big questions that crowd in on it from many sides. If it can find help ready-made in the labors of bygone days, that's just splendid. But this is eminently improbable. The history of philosophy can be a useful tool for philosophical work. But historical studies are no substitute for philosophizing.

The retreat into history mongering and the withdrawal into skepticism both represent a comparable failure of nerve in philosophizing, an unwillingness to take the cognitive tasks of the day into hand in the face of the difficulties and risks that are inherent in the enterprise.

ACKNOWLEDGING CLAIMS TO CONVICTION

When writing philosophy it is always advantageous to bear in mind how the situation looks from the reader's point of view. In particular, the writer of philosophy should constantly be asking: Just why is it that the reader should accept this claim of mine? And shrewd readers will also bear this in mind, constantly asking themselves—sentence by sentence—just why the author's claims should be accepted. With philosophical discussions, the reader can and should engage in a constant dialogue with the text, at each step challenging it with the question: On what sort of basis can the author expect us to accept the assertion at issue? Is it as a matter of scientific fact, of common sense—of what everybody should realize—of accepting the assertion of some expert or authority, of drawing a suitable conclusion from previously established facts, or just what? In reading—or writing—a philosophical discussion one is well advised to step back from the text and consider the prospects of such a legitimation commentary.

Ultimately, the issue of acceptability is always one of considerations we are expected to endorse or concede because of the plausibility of their *credentials*. And this has many ramifications.

Be it as single individuals or as entire generations, we always start our inquiries with the benefit of a diversified cognitive heritage, falling heir to that great mass of information and misinformation that is the "accumulated wisdom" of our predecessors—or those among them to whom we choose to listen. What William James called our "funded experience" of the world's ways—of its nature and our place within it—constitute the *data* at philosophy's disposal in its endeavor to accomplish its question-resolving work. These data of philosophy include:

1. commonsense beliefs, common knowledge, and what have been the ordinary convictions of the plain man since time immemorial;

2. the facts (or purported facts) afforded by the science of the day; the views of well-informed experts and authorities;

3. the lessons we derive from our experiential dealings with the world in everyday life;

4. the received opinions that constitute the worldview of the day; views that accord with the spirit of the times and the ambient convictions characteristic of one's cultural heritage;

5. tradition, inherited lore, and the transmitted wisdom of the past;

6. the teachings of history as best we can discern them.

No plausible source of information about how matters stand in the world fails to bring grist to philosophy's mill. The whole range of the (purportedly) established facts of experience furnishes the extraphilosophical input for our philosophizing—the materials, as it were, for our philosophical reflections.

All such philosophical data deserve respect: common sense, tradition, general belief, accepted (i.e., well established) prior theorizing—the sum total of the different sectors of our experience. They are all plausible, exerting some degree of cognitive pressure and having some claim on us. They may not constitute irrefutably established knowledge, but nevertheless they do have some degree of merit and, given our cognitive situation, it would be very convenient if they turned out to be true. The philosopher cannot simply turn his back on these data without further ado.

Still, even considering all this, there is nothing sacred and sacrosanct about the data. Taken as a whole, the data are too much for tenability—collectively they run into conflicts and contradictions. The long and short of it is that the data of philosophy constitute a plethora of fact (or purported fact) so ample as to threaten to sink any ship that carries so heavy a cargo. Those data are by no means unproblematic. The constraint they put on us is not peremptory and absolute—they do not represent certainties to which we must cling at all costs. What is owed to these data, in the final analysis, is not *acceptance* but merely *respect*. In philosophizing even the plainest of plain facts can be questioned, as indeed some of them must be. What counts here is, ultimately, not our individual beliefs but the entire belief system as a whole. The mission of the enterprise is, after all, to get a grasp on the issues as best we can—a grasp that reaches firmly across the board. What we seek is not only to get answers, but to have them be coherent and systematically harmonious.[5]

Coda

Even as philosophy itself should by rights aim at plausibility, logic, cogency, clarity, historical contextuality, and the like, so a philosophical text demands that its readers—in all due charity—impute to its author the aspiration to such desiderata, conceding to the most ample extent possible the

realization of these definitive aims of the philosophical enterprise. After all, the philosopher who, with the best of interpretive good will, falls short in point of plausibility and rational conviction is simply wasting the ink being put on paper.

NOTES

1 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 982b10. Oxford translation (modified). Actually, Plato's Socrates already maintained that wondering (*thamazein*) is the root-source (*archê*) of philosophy (*Theaetetus* 155d).

2 "What (If Anything) to Expect from Today's Philosophers," *Time*, 7 January, 1966, p. 25.

3 R. G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), p. 69.

4 John Herman Randall, *The Career of Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962-65), p. 50.

5 Materials for this chapter were drawn from editorials that the author wrote for the *American Philosophical Quarterly* during his many years of editorship of this journal.

Chapter 2

THE PROCESS
Hermeneutical Methodology Examined

1. EXEGETICAL INTERPRETATION

First things first. What is an "interpretation" of a text—and, in particular, of a *philosophical* text? When we speak of interpreting philosophical texts just what is it that is at issue?

Clearly, the best approach here is to proceed pragmatically via the question: What is to be the work or function of the interpretation? What is it that we expect an interpretation to do? Here there are several possibilities.

1. We may be on a fishing expedition for ideas. We may be after awareness expansion—looking to different *possible* interpretations, lines of thought that might conceivably be teased out of (or read into) the text. This sort of thing might be called *creative* interpretation.

2. We might be on the lookout for helps and aids. We might want to see what the text can do for us by way of providing grist for our own mill. Out aim here is either positive, to draw from the text suggestions for developing our points for consolidating our own position, or negative, to have a point of opposition or contrast for developing or formulating our own position. This sort of thing might be called *exploitative* interpretation.

3. However, we might be concerned primarily for flat-out instruction—for understanding the position of the author of the text. We might be determined to "get inside his mind", to grasp the text's message and become familiar within the belief manifold of its producer. This sort of thing might be called *exegetical* or *explanatory* interpretation.

However, it should be understood from the outset that when one speaks without further ado simply of *interpreting* a philosophical text it is specifically exegetical interpretation that is at issue. What is at issue is an explanation of a text's meaning, an elucidation of what it maintains, a clarifica-

tion of its claims and contentions. At the very minimum such an interpretation calls for an explanatory or informatively helpful paraphrase. But, in any case, a good interpretation here means one that does well—or at any rate one that can plausibly be held to do well—at one of the central missions of the interpretative enterprise, that of providing a clear and accurate view of the meaning and purport of the text in relation to the position or thought system of its author.

The point of the interpretative venture in philosophy is accordingly to facilitate comprehension. And, preeminently, this means removing obstacles to understanding: avoidable complications, inconsistencies, seeming paradoxes, and the like. Interpretations exist to ease the access way: the rational economy of cognitive effort is the governing principle of exegetical text interpretation.

In exegetical interpretation one operates in the domain of scholarship. Here issues of context become central, because the pivotal question is: What did *the author* mean by the text? The point of concern is with the original meaning and purport of the text. The issue of historical authenticity is paramount. But a text—and not only a text but any artifact that has an esthetic such as a painting or sculpture—can be regarded abstractly, in a context-independent way. Here the issue is not one of producer centrality but one of consumer centrality, and the issue is not "What *does* the text mean for its author?" but rather "What *can* the text mean for us?" Insofar as interpretation is at issue this is not the hermeneutical interpretation of meaning explanation at all, but rather the sort of thing at issue when we speak of a performer's interpretation of a musical composition or the director's interpretation of a play. What we do here is not so much to *interpret* the text as to creatively *reinterpret* it or endeavor to endow it with current relevancy and interest. Producing a play or a musical composition affords a paradigm example. Here we are (usually) not trying for historical authenticity but for the enlistment of interest. We are not addressing issues of scholarship but issues of edification or entertainment—stimulation into information is the object of the enterprise. Here authorship (and with it context) becomes of subsidiary importance—and imaginative creativity comes to the forefront. Where this sort of enterprise is at issue, the free-wheeling inventiveness envisioned by deconstructionisms has something to be said for it. But the hermeneutical commerce with texts geared to the enterprise of enlarged information and enhanced understanding their actual *meaning* as concrete historical artifacts is of course something quite different.

To be sure, text interpretation is a form of intellectual cartography in that one can proceed at very different levels of scale. It can, in practice as well as in principle, deal with terms or phrases, with sentences, with passages, and, indeed, with entire books and systems. Interpretations can proceed at the macro as well as the micro level. But at every level, the name of the game is that in exegetically interpreting philosophical texts we seek to make smooth the path to understanding—to remove, overcome, or explain away obscurities, ambiguities, conflicts, and other such obstacles to understanding.

2. WHY PHILOSOPHICAL TEXTS NEED INTERPRETATION

There are four principal reasons why philosophical texts stand in need of interpretation; distinct sorts of factors are at work here:

1. *The physical artifacts (MSS) underdetermine the texts.*

Writers, like the rest of us, are only human. Their handwriting may be imperfect or their paper impermanent. Simple text decipherment may pose problems. And then, too, even a Homer occasionally nods off. Writers may grow careless in what they set down, inviting philosophical reconstruction by way of plausible conjecture to effect needed textual emendations. It is easy to recall illustrations of the sort of thing at issue here. The aim of such textual reconstruction is to reconstitute the text to what the author had in mind (rather than being limited to what ultimately appeared in print.)

2. *The texts underdetermine the meaning at issue: they are vague, equivocal, enigmatic, or otherwise indecisive.*

Interpretation here calls for the removal of obscurity. For example, in the *Phenomenology* Hegel writes: “Self-consciousness favors and accepts duty as the Absolute.”[1] Understanding this is easier said than done. Does it mean:

- Humans, as self-conscious beings, always and inevitably recognize their duty and are absolutely compelled by it.

- Self-consciousness as a human capacity always regards what it accepts as a duty as something that is absolutely compelling (whether or not it actually lives up to its demands).

- Self-consciousness as a force or power in nature compels its practitioners to recognize and acknowledge their duties.

And the list goes on. That initial oracular statement is cryptic and rather indeterminate. The point is that workers too can become lazy and fail to explain sufficiently what they have in mind. Without an elaborate interpretative reconstruction we are left in a fog of mystification. So here interpretation proposed to reformulate the text as its author *should* have written it—that is, *would* have done if he were being sufficiently careful about it.

3. *The texts do not do justice to the author's position: they do not succeed in saying what the author means. The text as it stands is not an accurate statement of the position actually being advocated.*

Interpretation here calls for the removal of incongruity. The aim was to *replace* the text with a superior functional equivalent. "Reality," says Bergson, "makes itself or unmakes itself, but it is never something made."[2] But of course what makes or unmakes itself is through this very fact something made—indeed *self*-made. What Bergson *means* is that it is never *completely* or *fully* made—is never something finitely and definitively final. He does not literally mean what his text says.

Again, in Leibniz's *Monadology* we read:

> It is ever necessary that every monad be different from every other. For there are never *in nature* two beings that are perfectly alike and in which it would not be possible to find a difference that is internal of founded on an intrinsic denomination.[3]

It is clear, however, that this is a gravely defective articulation of Leibniz's position in regard to the "identity of indiscernibles". For those two little words *in nature* make it seem as though the point were that it is only here in nature—in this, the best of Leibnizianly possible worlds—that no two beings are perfectly alike. But what is at stake for Leibniz is a far deeper metaphysical principle, namely, that no possible world ever does or can contain two completely similar possible substances—that substances never can share *all* of their properties, irrespective of the possible world to which they may belong.

Display 5.1

AN EXTRACT FROM RAIMUND SCHMIDT'S EDITION FOR FELIX MEINER OF KANT'S *CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON*:

Nichts anderes war [die Dialektik bei den alten], als die Logik des Scheins. Eine[1] sophistische Kunst, seiner Unwissenheit, ja auch seinen vorsätzlichen Blendwerken den[2] Anstrich der Wahrheit zu geben, dass[3] man die Methode der Gründlichkeit, welche die Logik überhaupt vorschreibt, nachahmte, und ihre Topik zu[4] Beschönigung jedes leeren Vorgebens benutzte. Nun kann man es als eine sichere und brauchbare Warnung anmerken: dass die allgemeine Logik, als Organon betrachtet, jederzeit eine Logik des Scheins, d. i. dialektisch sei. Denn da sie uns gar nichts über den Inhalt der Erkenntnis lehrt, sondern nur bloss die formalen Bedingungen der Übereinstimmung mit dem Verstande, welche übringens in Ansehung der Gegenstände gänzlich gleichgültig sind[5]; so muss die Zumutung, sich derselben als eines Werkzeugs (Organon) zu gebrauchen[6], um seine Kenntnisse, wenigstens dem Vorgeben nach, auszubreiten und zu erweitern, auf nichts als Geschwätzigkeit hinauslaufen, alles, was man will, mit einigem Schein zu behaupten, oder auch nach Belieben anzufechten.

Eine solche Unterweisung ist der Würde der Philosophie auf keine Weise gemäss. Um deswillen hat man diese Benennung der Dialektik[7] lieber, als eine *Kritik des dialektischen Scheins*, der Logik beigezählt, und als eine solche wollen wir sie auch hier verstanden wissen. (A61-62=B85-86).

---

1 Vaihinger: "Scheins; eine."
2 Vaihinger: "Blendwerken dadurch den."
3 Erdmann: "dedurch dass."
4 Vorländer: "zur."
5 Org. "seyn."
6 Erdmann: "bedienen."
7 Erdmann: "hat man diese Dialektik;" Görland: "Diesen Titel einer Dialektik."

---

4. *The texts conflict with what the author says elsewhere.*

Interpretation here calls for the removal of apparent conflicts. A good instance of this phenomenon is provided in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. In one passage we read:

> These principles ... contain ... ideas for the guidance of the empirical employment of reason—ideas which reason follows only as it were asymptotically ... yet which possess ... validity, and serve as rules for possible experience. They [the ideas of reason] can also be employed with great advantage in the elaboration of experience. ... *A transcendental deduction of them cannot, however, be effected; in the case of ideas ... such a deduction is never possible*.[4]

Yet only a few pages farther on we read as follows:

> We cannot employ as *a priori* concept with any assurance without having first given a transcendental deduction of it. The ideas of pure reason do not, indeed, adopt of the kind of deduction that is possible in the case of the categories. But if *they are to have the least objective validity, no matter how indeterminate that validity may be, and are not to be mere empty thought-things* (*entia rationis ratiocinatis*), *a [transcendental] deduction of them must be possible*.[5]

Clearly there is a discrepancy here that a viable interpretation of the text must endeavor to overcome. And to this end a series of more or less standard reinterpretative strategies lies at one's disposal, the prime candidate in the present case being the drawing of a distinction between different kinds of transcendental deduction.

Consider for the sake of an example the case of two incompatible statements:

- *A*s are *B*s.
- *A*s are not *B*s.

This sort of conflict situation can be addressed by several stylized strategies. One of them is that of *distinction*. The theses at issue here come to be changed through limitation to:

- Type 1 *A*s are *B*s.
- Type 2 *A*s are not *B*s.

A second strategy is that of *qualification*, where the theses at issue are to be changed through an aspectival limitation to:

- *A*s are *B*s in respect of *X* (or when regarded from perspective *x*).
- *A*s are not *B*s in respect of *Y* (or when regarded from perspective *y*).

Such proceedings illustrate a more general aspect of the situation. Text interpretation is a rational process that has its own characteristic struc-

ture—it represents an effort that can be carried on by the use of tactics and strategies drawn from a large bag of characteristic tricks.

These, then, are some of the principal ways in which philosophical texts cry out for interpretation. And so, there can be little wonder why the theory of text interpretation should be seen as a significant item on the philosophical agenda.

3. THE PRINCIPLE OF CONTEXTUALITY—CONTEXTUAL COHERENCE AS A KEY INTERPRETATIVE STANDARD

The idea of a merit-annihilating indifferentism in textual interpretation is willfully blind to a crucial reality. Interpretations—and the texts with which they are concerned—are emphatically *not* created equal: Some make sense, some only nonsense; some are ambiguous (have many plausible interpretations), others are more definite; some convey much information, others little; some state truths, some falsehoods. What the fallacy of indifferentist relativism of text interpretation overlooks, to its own decisive detriment, is the key matter of *context*. In interpreting texts context at every level and of every mode becomes crucial.

The process of *deconstruction*—of interpretatively dissolving any and every text into a plurality of supposedly merit-equivalent constructions—can and should be offset by the process of *reconstruction*, which calls for viewing texts within their larger contexts. After all, texts inevitably have a setting—historical, cultural, authorial—on which their actual meaning is critically dependent. And this contextual setting projects beyond the textual realm itself in comprising both processes (know-how) and products (artifacts) relating to human action in relevant regards. In particular, it encompasses both noncommunicative practices (behavioral) and communicative practices, including the processes, procedures, and methods in relation to text-contemporaneous styles of life, the products of noncommunicative processes and practices (material involvements), and the relevant social traditions. Texts coordinate with thought and thought coordinates with action. To the extent that we do not understand the ways and means of a people's mode of living—their ways of thought and action—we will have great difficulty in understanding their texts. In sum, texts have a wider functional context, and this means that text interpretation is not a matter of free-floating imagination—it is a matter of *scholarship*.

The salient point that has to be urged against deconstructionism's hermeneutical egalitarianism is not that every reality is virtual. The textual

realm is *not* closed because texts often as not concern themselves with the real world. They can and do bear on noncommunicative processes and interactions with artifacts of a text-external realm. There are not only tennis rulebooks and tennis manuals but also tennis courts and players and games. Texts interconnect with reality through the mediation of intelligent agents.

Neglect of this crucial contextual dimension leads to what is perhaps the most severe shortcoming of deconstructionism—its deeply problematic commitment to the idea that the textual realm is self-sufficient and autonomous. Such a stance reflects the bias of academics committed to a logocentrism that sees the world in terms of discourse and forgets that it is not the case that everything in this world of ours is a matter of language through and through. Our texts and our use of words are, for the most part, no more than just one other instrumentality by which we function in a nontextual world—in this instance previously the social world of human interaction. To see texts and the libraries that warehouse them as context-disconnectedly self-sufficient is akin to contemplating the molehills without the mole.[6]

To be sure, all of the various interpretations of a text that are not totally bizarre have (by assumption) some sort of merit—there is almost always *something* to be said for them. But to affirm this is not, of course, to say that all those different (nonabsurd) interpretations are thereby *equally* meritorious. To concede the prospect of a hermeneutical underdetermination that allows for a plurality of alternative nonabsurd interpretations is certainly *not* to say that any such interpretation is every bit as viable as any other. The situation here is akin to the old story that trades on the Talmudic belief that each passage of the Torah contains forty-nine possible meanings. The story has it that once a student offered an interpretation of a passage to the rabbi who was giving him instruction. “No, you are quite wrong,” the rabbi proclaimed. “How can you say that?” protested the student. “Didn’t you say there are forty-nine meanings for each passage?” “Yes,” replied the rabbi, “but yours isn’t one of them.”

To be sure, the information at our disposal is often incomplete. Given the often underdeterminative impetus of our contextual resources, the interpretation of texts is sometimes somewhat flexible. But there are definite limits to the elasticity that is available here.

Any viable approach to the theory of text interpretation must accordingly be *normative*: it must be predicated on standards and criteria that provide for the evaluation of better and worse, of sensible and foolish, of responsible and irresponsible. Sensible text interpretation is not a matter of

anything-goes imaginative flights into the never-never world of free-floating fancy; it is tethered to the down-to-earth realities of the case imposed by rational standards of validity and appropriateness.

The idea that any and every construal of a text—any bending or twisting of its message—is as good as any other is particularly dubious with any text that has a how-to aspect, whether this be small scale (recipes for baking bread, instructions for cleaning a rifle) or large scale (prescriptions for successful salesmanship, guidelines to scanning Latin poetry). In such matters there is no anything-goes plasticity; some ways of interpreting that text and implementing the lessons of such an interpretation are materially better than others. The merit of deconstructionism lies in its stress on the importance of texts in humanistic studies and on the pluralism of interesting, discussible, and attention-worthy interpretations. But its defect lies in the idea that interpretations are created equal—that issues of quality and cogency are out of place in this domain.

The crucial task of text interpretation is one of not merely *examining* possibilities but of *evaluating* them. One must go beyond the survey of *possible* interpretations to assess which of them are *plausible* and—going even beyond this—to endeavor to decide which (if any) among them is *optimal*. But how to implement this project?

It is a profound error to see the textual sector as closed—to take the line that it is all a matter of texts "all the way through". Texts come into contact with contexts. The cardinal instrumentality of text interpretation is represented by the principle of *hermeneutical optimization* according to a standard of merit provided by the coherence of the proposed interpretation of a text with its overall context. Whatever interpretation best harmonizes with a text's overall context is ipso facto a superior interpretation that thereby has greater claims on our acceptance. In the light of such contextual considerations, text interpretations are emphatically not created equal.

The most sensible approach to the existence of a variety of alternative text interpretations is what might be called the *coherence theory* of interpretation. After all, text interpretation is a practice that can be more or less adequate in the light of the ultimate goal of *systematization*: of fitting texts into context in a way that realizes a systemic harmonization. It is a matter of assembling all of the bits and pieces of information at our disposal into a coherent overall picture. For only can a text have a *subtext* of implicit but inarticulated and merely implied messages but it also—and more usually—has a *supertext*, a wider contextual environment within which its own message is formatively emplaced. It is in fact coherence with the resources of

context (in the widest sense of this term) that is at once the appropriate instrument of text interpretation and the impetus to objectivity in this domain.

It is necessary for a sensible venture in text interpretation to reject the mistaken idea that there is no *hors de texte*—that we can afford to forget about the existence of an extratextual world with which we humans interrelate on the basis of texts. The use of words is not something free-wheeling that stands disconnected from the verbal and behavioral environment in which they figure. The textual realm is not disconnected from the realm of human praxis. (Indeed, even moving into and through that textual realm is a matter of praxis—producing and consuming texts is a matter of *doing* things.) The context of a text is set not only by other related texts but also by the artifacts that constitute its material environment and by the common elements of experience that we are ourselves inclined to share with that text's author in virtue of the fact of sharing a common experiential framework in a shared human setting in a common world. And this endows texts with an objective aspect.

To be sure, with textual interpretation as with all other branches of rational endeavor we can obtain no categorical guarantees. Here, as in any other inductive situation, all that rationality can do for us is to offer us the best available prospect of successful goal realization. But insofar as we are reasonable this circumstance should also satisfy us, seeing that it is absurd to ask for more than can possibly be had.

This aspect of philosophy as a venture in rational inquiry means that texts occur within doctrinal settings. Philosophical texts virtually always have a context within the enterprise of giving answers to our questions and substantiating them. And here lies the prospect of replacing deconstructionism's nihilistic indifferentisms with a position based on evaluative standards.

Just such a shift is very much in order. The idea that a merit-annihilating equivalency holds reign in the sphere of textual interpretation overlooks to a crucial reality. What indifferentist relativism of text interpretation overlooks to its own decisive detriment is the crucial matter of purpose *context.* Interpretations—and the texts through which they are conveyed—are emphatically *not* created equal: Some make sense, some only nonsense; some are ambiguous (have many plausible interpretations), others are more definite; some convey much information, others little; some state truths, some falsehoods. Possible interpretations are one sort of thing, and genuinely plausible interpretations another. And the two are separated by the

impact of an *evaluation* that only conscientious scholarship can provide.

There are certainly those among us—the post-modern deconstructionists—who see text interpretation as an ever-inclusive speculative venture because nothing definite can be achieved by its means. But there is a cogent rationale for seeing such a deconstructionist relativism as unacceptable with respect to philosophical discourse. After all, philosophy is a serious cognitive endeavor, a venture in question resolution by rationally cogent means—in sum, an enterprise in problem solving. Philosophizing does—or should—seek to provide rationally defeasible answers to significant questions. Unlike purely "belles-lettristic" literature, that is to say, philosophy's mission is not to stimulate our imagination but to provide informative instruction.[7]

NOTES

1 G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, VI, C a.

2 Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: H. Holt & Co., 1911), p. 296.

3 G. W. Leibniz, *Monadology*, Sect. 9.

4 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A663-63 = B691-92. Italics supplied.

5 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A669 = B697. Italics supplied.

6 This *a propos* of the quip that a book no more shows where its author is presently located in thought than a molehill shows where its maker is presently located in nature.

7 Some further relevant detail is provided in the author's *Communicative Pragmatism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998).

Chapter 3

THE CONTRAST
A Critique of Deconstructionism

1. ON DECONSTRUCTIONISM

There are few areas in which the currently fashionable assault on objectivity has been more prominent than in connection with the study of language and the texts that we produce by its means. The "deconstructionism" associated with the name of Jacques Derrida is Exhibit No. 1 here.[1]

Deconstructionism is a theory regarding the interpretation of texts that denies any prospect of realizing objectivity in this domain. Initially projected with regard to *literary* texts, the enthusiasm of its more ambitious exponents soon led them to expand the theory's application to texts in general—historical, biographical, philosophical, what have you. The doctrinal core of the position involves two theses, first, that a text always allows many alternative interpretative constructions whose elaboration is the proper mission of the interpretative enterprise, and second, that all these various interpretations are effectively coequal in merit—that none can be dismissed as unsuitable, inappropriate, incompetent, or the like. At the core of this doctrinal stance lies a view of textual plasticity—that as the enterprise of text interpretation proceeds, it brings to view an ever-increasing range of viable and more or less equi-meritorious alternative interpretations. As deconstructionism sees the matter, the enterprise of text interpretation accordingly confronts us with an inevitable plethora of coequal alternative possibilities. On this basis, the partisans of deconstructionism condemn with the dismissive epithet of *textualism* the view that a given text has a meaning in so stable and objective way as to favor one particular interpretation over the rest. They insist that there is no room for objectivity here because interpretation is a matter of the pervasive variability of "to each his own".

Insofar as this deconstructionist perspectives represents a *doctrine* rather than a methodological *attitude* about text interpretation, it is a position based on a group of hermeneutical views or contentions that may be

sketched roughly as follows: In the domain of text interpretation we face a situation of —

(1) *Omnitextuality*: Any proposed interpretation of a text must itself take the form of simply another text. In the hermeneutical sphere there is no way of exiting from the textual domain.

(2) *Plasticity*: Every text has multiple interpretations—it admits a plurality of diverse constructions.

(3) *Equivalency*: Every interpretation is as good as any other. These various interpretative constructions of a text are all of equal or roughly equal merit: none is definitive, canonical, discriminatively appropriate—indeed none is substantially more cogent or tenable than the others.

This state of affairs means that in interpreting texts we always confront a plurality of (roughly co-meritorious) variants. Text interpretation admits of no rational validation or invalidation of one resolution over against another. It is simply an exercise of free imagination: a project in which we can do no more than to explore interesting possibilities and cannot hope to validate a particular result as optimal in a cogent and stable way. Where issues of interpretation are concerned, we can only explore alternatives and cannot substantiate particular resolutions; we can project possibilities but cannot reduce them by eliminative processes of plausibility assessment. Accordingly, we should never ask what a text *does* mean, but only what it *can* or *might* mean. In the realm of text interpretation there are no forced choices: it is an inherently indecisive enterprise—a fact that, happily, manages to "liberate us from the prison-house of language".[2] Deconstructionism is, in sum, a doctrine of indifferentist relativism with respect to textual interpretation. In its refusal to let those restrictive considerations of rational cogency come into play, it is the diametric opposite of objectivism in this domain.

How can a more judgmental rationalism come to judicious grips with such an anarchical position? Clearly, there is little point in quarreling with theses (1) and (2) of the preceding argumentation, seeing that the former is an obvious and evident truth, and that the latter a fact amply substantiated by historical evidence. And it follows from these two theses that any interpretation itself admits of variant interpretations. The problematic crux of

deconstructionism's argument for a relativistic indifferentiation of text interpretation is thus premise (3), with its assertion of merit equivalency. But is this premise tenable? Is the hermeneutic realm indeed a free-for-all ruled by the idea that all interpretations are created equal? Is the textual interpreter indeed wandering through a hall of mirrors, wholly unable to implement the distinction between appearance and reality?

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT: THE FLAW IN THE DECONSTRUCTION'S OINTMENT

The idea that a merit-annihilating indifferentism holds reign in the sphere of textual interpretation is willfully blind to a crucial reality. Interpretations—and the texts through which they are conveyed—are emphatically *not* created equal: Some make sense, some only nonsense; some are ambiguous (have many plausible interpretations), others are more definite; some convey much information, others little; some state truths, some falsehoods. What the fallacy of indifferentist relativism of text interpretation overlooks, to its own decisive detriment, is the crucial matter of *context*.

The process of *deconstruction*—of interpretatively dissolving any and every text into a plurality of supposedly merit-equivalent constructions—can and should be offset by the process of *reconstruction*, which calls for viewing texts within their larger contexts. After all, texts inevitably have a setting—historical, cultural, authorial—on which their actual meaning is critically dependent. And this contextual setting projects beyond the textual realm itself in comprising both processes (know-how) and products (artifacts) relating to human action in relevant regards. In particular, it encompasses both noncommunicative practices (behavioral) and communicative practices, including the processes, procedures, and methods in relation to text-contemporaneous styles of life, the products of noncommunicative processes and practices (material involvements), and the relevant social traditions. To the extent that we do not understand the ways and means of a people's mode of living—what they are concerned to do and to produce—we will have great difficulty in understanding their texts. In sum, texts have a wider functional context, and this means that text interpretation is not a matter of free-floating imagination—it is a matter of *scholarship*.

The crucial point that has to be urged against deconstructionism's hermeneutical egalitarianism is not that every reality is virtual. The textual realm is *not* closed because texts often as not concern themselves with the real world. They can and do bear on noncommunicative processes and in-

teractions with artifacts of a text-external realm. There are not only tennis rulebooks and tennis manuals but also tennis courts and players and games. Texts interconnect with reality through the mediation of intelligent agents.

Neglect of this crucial contextual dimension leads to what is perhaps the most severe shortcoming of deconstructionism, betokening its deeply problematic commitment to the idea that the textual realm is self-sufficient and autonomous. Such a stance reflects the bias of academics committed to a logocentrism that sees the world in terms of discourse and forgets that it is not the case that everything is a matter of language through and through. Our texts and our use of words are, for the most part, no more than just one other instrumentality by which we function in a nontextual world—in this instance previously the social world of human interaction. To see texts and the libraries that warehouse them as context-disconnectedly self-sufficient is akin to contemplating the molehills without the mole.[3]

3. COHERENCE AS AN INTERPRETATIVE STANDARD

To be sure, all of the various interpretations of a text that are not totally bizarre have in view of this circumstance some sort of merit—there is almost always *something* to be said for them. But to affirm this is not, of course, to say that all those different (nonabsurd) interpretations are thereby *equally* meritorious. To concede the prospect of a hermeneutical underdetermination that allows for a plurality of alternative nonabsurd interpretations is certainly *not* to say that any such interpretation is every bit as viable as any other.

Any viable approach to the theory of text interpretation must be *normative*: it must be predicated on standards and criteria that provide for the evaluation of better and worse, of sensible and foolish, of responsible and irresponsible. Sensible text interpretation is not a matter of anything-goes imaginative flights into the never-never world of free-floating fancy; it is tethered to the down-to-earth realities of the case imposed by rational standards of validity and appropriateness. The situation here is akin to the old story that trades on the Talmudic belief that each passage of the Torah contains forty-nine possible meanings. The story has it that once a student offered an interpretation of a passage to the rabbi who was giving him instruction. “No, you are quite wrong,” the rabbi proclaimed. “How can you say that?” protested the student. “Didn’t you say there are forty-nine meanings for each passage?” “Yes,” replied the rabbi, “but yours isn’t one of them.”

Given the often underdeterminative impetus of our contextual resources, the interpretation of texts is sometimes somewhat flexible. But there are definite limits to the elasticity that is available here.

The idea that any and every construal of a text—any bending or twisting of its message—is as good as any other is particularly dubious with any text that has a how-to aspect, whether this be small scale (recipes for baking bread, instructions for cleaning a rifle) or large scale (prescriptions for successful salesmanship, guidelines to scanning Spanish poetry). In such matters there is no anything-goes plasticity; some ways of interpreting that text and implementing the lessons of such an interpretation are materially better than others. The merit of deconstructionism lies in its stress on the importance of texts in humanistic studies and on the pluralism of interesting, discussible, and attention-worthy interpretations. But its defect lies in the idea that interpretations are created equal—that issues of quality and cogency are out of place in this domain.

The crucial task of text interpretation is thus one of not merely *examining* possibilities but of *evaluating* them. One must go beyond the survey of *possible* interpretations to assess which of them are *plausible* and—going even further—to endeavor to decide which (if any) among them is *optimal*. But how to implement this project?

It would be a profound error to see the textual sector as closed—to take the line that it is all a matter of texts "all the way through". Texts come into contact with contexts. The cardinal instrumentality of text interpretation is represented by the principle of *hermeneutical optimization* according to a standard of merit provided by the coherence of the proposed interpretation of a text with its overall context. Whatever interpretation best harmonizes with a text's overall context is ipso facto a superior interpretation that thereby has greater claims on our acceptance. In the light of such contextual considerations, text interpretations are emphatically not created equal.

Philosophy, of course, cares devotedly for the truth of things. But in order to assess whether what a text says is true (or even merely plausible) we have to determine just what it is that the text asserts. To be sure, the two issues are not entirely independent. Let it be that a given text T has three possible alternative interpretations T_1, T_2, and T_3. In weighing them against each other we must take into account:

1. their claims to inherent plausibility

2. their claims to communicative significance and informativeness (in the context at issue)

3. their claims to contextual coherence

And here the plausibility (or truth) of the substantive claims at issue is not enough. For informativeness too is of the essence. Neither do we want truth that is not instructive in the context, nor yet truths that are trivial and insignificant. The best interpretation is one that affords optimal balance among such desiderata.

The most sensible approach to the existence of a variety of alternative text interpretations is thus what might be called the *coherence theory* of interpretation.[4] After all, text interpretation is a practice that can be more or less adequate in the light of the ultimate good of *systematization*: of fitting texts into context in a way that realizes a systemic learning. Not only can a text have a *subtext* of implicit but inarticulate messages but it also—and more usually—has a *supertext*, a wider contextual environment within which its own message must be construed. It is in fact coherence with the resources of context (in the widest sense of this term) that is at once the appropriate instrument of text interpretation and the impetus to objectivity in this domain.

For sensible text interpretation one must reject the mistaken idea that it is permissible to forget the existence of an extratextual world with which we humans interrelate on the basis of texts. The use of words is not something free-wheeling that stands disconnected from the verbal and behavioral environment in which they figure. The textual realm is not disconnected from the realm of human praxis. (Indeed, even moving into and through that textual realm is a matter of praxis—producing and consuming texts is a matter of *doing* things.) The context of a text is set not only by other related texts but also by the artifacts that constitute its material environment and by the common elements of experience that we are ourselves inclined to share with that text's author in virtue of the fact of sharing a common experiential framework in a shared human setting in a common world. And this endows texts with an objective aspect.

To be sure, with textual interpretation as with all other branches of rational endeavor we can obtain no categorical guarantees. Here, as in any other inductive situation, all that rationality can do for us is to offer us the best available prospect of successful goal realization. But insofar as we are

reasonable this circumstance should also satisfy us, seeing that it is absurd to ask for more than can possibly be had.

4. AGAINST TEXTUAL EGALITARIANISM IN COMMUNICATIVE CONTEXTS

Jacques Derrida maintains in his *Speech and Phenomena*[5] that Western scholarship has privileged *voice* (authorial thought and intention) over *writing* (the resultant objective text)—process over product. But this involves a profound misconception. It overlooks the import of the hermeneutic circle: the lesson that in the endeavor to understand texts issues of process and product are coordinate, that neither can be subordinated to the other—let alone consigned to oblivion. To agree with Derrida in subordinating process (voice) to product (the textual product in writing) would be to ignore the crucial lesson that what a text *is* depends on its function, on what it sets out to do. And that at this point the author's own position is dominant. The texts being of the author's making, we need to take the context of its production into account to determine what it actually is as a product.

The reason why interpretations are not created equal lies in circumstance of their contextual embedding in voice-related matters. Texts are produced with a view to their communicative mission; they are instruments of communication—of conveying information and canalizing to action—even where the only action at issue is one of deliberation or discussion. Even merely belles-lettristic texts can guide people toward implementation of beliefs and values in ways that can be pointless and meretricious—or the reverse (to say nothing about matters of teaching and writing). Texts can be veridical or mendacious, helpful or hurtful. They are not disconnected from life: they can be life enhancing or life degrading, can impel us to take views that conduce to self-enhancement or to self-loathing.

Medical texts influence the medications we take. Engineering texts influence the projects we construct. Literary texts influence the values we maintain and the lives we lead on their basis. Philosophical texts influence our priorities and the way we conduct our intellectual affairs. Texts have a bearing not only on what we think but also on what we do: our actions and activities, our experiments and observations, our predictions and ventures at control. And insofar as texts are elements of a wider teleological domain, their adequate interpretation will pivot on this fact. The textual world is *not* self-contained; it is inextricably interconnected with the realm of ac-

tion, activity, and living. And actions (even intellectual action such as understanding) can be more or less successful. Accordingly, we can evaluate texts (representations) because they have a pragmatic dimension in the communicative domain.

To be sure one cannot leave writing out of it. The public dimension is uneliminable. In using language to produce his text, the author avails himself of a public instrumentality. What words mean is a matter of convention—of the social and, as it were, decisional modus operandi of human linguistic and symbolic arrangements. And of course what can *appropriately* (warrantedly, correctly) be said once those controversial arrangements are in place is something that is itself no longer free-floating and decisional. Once we decide what *cat* and *mat* mean, the question of whether one can appropriately assert "The cat is on the mat" is not an issue open for *decisional* resolution: our contribution has come to an end and the rest lies with the nature of things. What our words stand for—what we *mean* by *cat* or *mat* or *dog*—is entirely a matter of human arrangements, of the decision of linguistic communities. But once these matters are fixed, the question of whether and where and how frequently dogs and cats are to be encountered in nature—and in the proximity of one another and of mats—is something that only nature can resolve; the conventional arrangements of language-using communities have nothing further to do with it. The world's concrete realities now gain the upper hand. Here text interpretation once more requires an objective and, as it were, contextual dimension.

The critical flaw of a deconstructionist relativism of texts and their interpretations lies in the fact that rational evaluation is possible also in this interpretative sphere. Texts can and should be evaluated in terms of their contextual ramifications. The appropriateness of thought and assertion in matters of communication will generally depend on objective factors outside the domain of individual wish or action. It simply is not the case that everything in the textual realm is created equal—as deconstructionist relativism would have us believe. The resources of systemic coherence within an overall purposive context preclude an indifferentist egalitarianism of textual interpretation and provide for an interpretative objectivism.

In philosophy at least a sensible venture in text interpretation must reject the mistaken idea that the use of words is something free-wheeling that spins along disconnected from the larger verbal and behavioral environment in which they figure. It is a profound error to see the textual sector is closed—to take the line that it is all a matter of texts "all the way through", seeing that texts come equipped with contexts.

5. IRENIC CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

There is, of course, always the prospect of a halfway house between personal subjectivity and impersonal objectivity that goes with the interpersonal agreement that can obtain within particular communities.[6] But this halfway house does not afford a really habitable space in the present context. Communities and their practices and traditions are almost as fickle and fallible as individuals. They, too, can overlook and neglect crucial considerations. Even when we know how the community *does* comport itself we can still ask how it *should* comport itself. And this is something we can do—though admittedly only within limits—with respect to the community to which we ourselves belong. Objectivity is an ideal toward which we can and should strive, but no one says that the process is easy. The prospect of different questions looms before us. What *does* the text mean? is one sort of issue, and What *might* the text mean? another. Here as elsewhere the answer pivots on what the question at issue is.

The situation is not, however, entirely one-sided. There is something, after all, that can be said for the deconstructionist perspective. But interestingly enough, this something falls wholly outside the sphere of meaning-oriented hermeneutics. When we speak of interpreting a literary text, two distinctly different things can be at issue. It is crucial to distinguish between:

- *exegetical interpretation*—the endeavor to elucidate the meaning of a text in relation to the intentions of its producer vis-à-vis the intended audience then and there

- *imaginative* (*re-*)*interpretation*—the recasting or re-presentation of a text in an endeavor to evoke aesthetic responses and affective resonances in a current (present-day) recipient

In doing actual (exegetical) interpretation we operate in the domain of scholarship. Here issues of context become central, because the pivotal question is: What did *the author* mean by the text? The point of concern is with the original meaning and purport of the text. The issue of historical authenticity is paramount. But a text—and not only a text but any artifact which, like a painting or sculpture has an informative aspect—can be regarded abstractly, in a context-independent way. Here the issue is not one of producer centrality but one of consumer centrality, and the issue is not

"What *does* the text mean for its author?" but rather "What *can* the text mean for us?" Insofar as interpretation is at issue this is not the hermeneutical interpretation of meaning explanation at all, but rather the sort of thing at issue when we speak of a performer's interpretation of a musical composition or the director's interpretation of a play. What we do here is not so much to *interpret* the text as to creatively *reinterpret* it or endeavor to endow it with current relevancy and interest. Producing a play or a musical composition affords a paradigm example of the circumstance. For the most part we are here not trying for historical authenticity but for the enlistment of interest. We are not addressing issues of scholarship but issues of edification or entertainment. And so, authorship (and with it context) becomes of subsidiary importance—and imaginative creativity comes to the forefront. Where this sort of enterprise is at issue, the free-wheeling inventiveness envisioned by deconstructionisms has something to be said for it. But the hermeneutical commerce with texts geared to the enterprise of understanding their actual *meaning* as concrete historical artifacts is of course something quite different.

Viewed in this light, the principal thesis of our deliberations attains greater clarity. It is that while philosophical texts often are interpretatively underdeterminative and admit a variety of theoretically possible interpretations, this range is generally narrowed—and often drastically reduced—by plausibility considerations of the sort at issue with considerations of contextual fit, which is to say by the processes and procedures of good old-fashioned scholarship.

The crux, then, is the contrast between text interpretation as conscientious scholarly exegesis as against an imaginative de- (or perhaps better re-) construction of texts freed from the constraint of considerations of historical context—and thus with issues of scholarly exegesis in suspension. And behind this duality of approach there looms a far-reaching quarrel in the area of educational approach and policy. The question is who owns the texts—by whose ground rules of textual interpretation is the game to be played. Are we to deal in scholarly exegesis or in imaginative edification? Are the text consumers at issue expected to bring scholarly investigation to bear, or are they being invited to indulge in imaginative flights of fancy? And, in particular, in conjuring with texts in the educational process, are we to advantage the philologically and historically well informed, or are we to create a more level playing field of imaginative sensibility where anyone can play?

In sum, then, the fact has to be recognized that texts come into being in relation to rather different sorts of aims and purposes. In particular, they can be made either for the transmission of information and ideas or for thought provocation and the stimulation of the inventive imagination. And therefore two quite different interpretative enterprises can be at issue. Only where we put substantive (let alone scholarly) concerns aside and use text-interpretation as a means to thought provocation—as a training ground for the free-ranging imagination—does a free-floating deconstructionist approach to texts make any sense. The prospect of a *theoretical* reconciliation is thus at hand: It's all a matter of how you understand interpretation. Different things can be at stake. Scholarly exegesis is one, deconstructively imaginative innovation is another.

In the communicative use of texts, where the transmission of information is the most important factor, the impetus to objectivity is paramount. And this holds even for literary texts—given that the authors of such works generally desire and endeavor to be understood in their own terms. Ultimately, it is a matter of ownership. Hermeneuticists recognize the ownership rights of authors and the scholars who address their products. Deconstructionists think that texts belong to interpreters to do with as they wish in using texts as springboards for ventures in the imaginative expansion of sensitivity.

To be sure, life is not there for toil alone. (All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy!) There will be time for serious thought and time for imaginative fancy. But it is only when intellectual endeavor takes a playful turn that deconstructivism comes into play. When it is the informative aspect in any of its dimensions that is at issue in the texts with which we deal, then our interpretative efforts will have to take the more scholarly road where objectivity once again comes to the fore.

All the same, it must be granted that there are some grains of truth in the deconstructionist position. In matters of text interpretation, perfection—and thus the knock-down, drag-out augmentation that goes with it—will often indeed be unachievable. We thus do well to concede that perfection and decisive completeness may well not be attainable in this domain. Still the fact remains that while we may not be able to complete our interpretative tasks in a final and definite way we can—and should—labor to improve on what we have. Progress without the prospect of perfection is the watchword in hermeneutics as in morals.

Granted, all of the various interpretations of a text that are not totally bizarre have (by assumption) some sort of merit—there is almost always

something to be said for them. In view of the generally underdeterminative impetus of our contextual resources, the interpretation of texts is usually somewhat flexible. But there are definite limits to the elasticity that is available here. The partisans of a hermeneutical relativism that maintains the equivalency of possible interpretations are talking through their deconstructionist hats.[7]

NOTES

1 See especially his *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1967), trans. G. Spivak as *Of Grammatology*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

2 J. Hillis Miller in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom, et al. (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), p. 229.

3 This *a propos* of the quip that a book no more shows where its author is presently located in thought than a molehill shows where its maker is presently located in nature.

4 See pp. 168-69 above.

5 Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. D. Allison (Evanston, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1973). Original: *Le voix et le phénomène* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1972).

6 In the context of textual interpretation the case for this halfway house position is cogently formulated in Stanley Fish's *Is There a Text in This Class: The Anthology of Interpersonal Computers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980).

7 This chapter was initially presented as a paper read at the annual meeting of the American Catholic Philosophical Association held in Pittsburgh in March of 1998.

Chapter 4

THE AGENDA
What Issues Are to Figure in Philosophical Deliberations?

1. UNEXAMINED ISSUES AND AGENDA CONSTITUTION

The agenda of philosophy has undergone a massive transformation in the course of the 20th century. But philosophers themselves have taken little note of this. It seems that everyone has been so preoccupied with their own particular bit of philosophizing that they have seldom looked to see the collective ground shifting under their feet.

Any domain of informative deliberation or discussion gives rise to two major sectors: the procedural and the substantive. The former consists most prominently of the *agenda*, the range of problems, questions, and issues that are addressed. The later consists primarily of its position—the range of answers, theses, doctrines that are proposed with respect to the problems. Both sectors are crucial to the overall enterprise, but the former question-oriented realm is, if anything, even more so because one only reaches the second, answer-oriented realm through its mediation. This generally pervasive state of affairs obtains in philosophy as decidedly as everywhere. For in base of any philosopher's doctrines and contentions (duly supported by reasons and arguments, as the nature of the subject demands) there lies the matter of the range of problems and issues addressed.

Aristotle's extensive writings have little to say regarding the philosophy of history and the epistemology of historiography. Descartes tells us nothing about the proper organization of the state and the constitution of a just society. Various philosophical issues simply do not figure in the writings of certain philosophers.

What is one to make of such silence? It can, clearly occur for very different sorts of reasons, among which the following are prime prospects:

- In the philosopher's day the issue had not yet been invented as a topic for philosophical discussion. (Political philosophy did not exist in Pre-socratic thought prior to the Sophists.)

- The philosopher lacked time or interest, regarding other issues as being of higher priority. (Kant did not discuss the philosophy of medicine, e.g., the ethics of cloning.)

- The philosopher believed that the issue does not deserve consideration, being pointless, meaningless, or otherwise inappropriate. (Hume maintained silence on most issues of traditional metaphysics.)

In the work of individual philosophers, particular issues can accordingly be unrecognized (unseen), unprized (discounted), or dismissed (abandoned).

The first mode of issue neglect is the least interesting since its rationale is wholly extra-philosophical, entirely rooted in the contingencies of history. It is all too obvious that an issue, like an artifact, cannot be manipulated before it is invented. But the other two—discounting and dismissal—are philosophically more interesting. For they stand in need of defense. They would, ideally at least, call for taking an explicit and deliberate stance on the part of a conscientious inquirer. The question of just what is to figure on the agenda and what the relative priority of these items should be is itself clearly an appropriate, nay ultimately inevitable subject of philosophical deliberation. Moreover, knowing what question is being addressed—and its wider problem-context—is in general critical to understanding the purport of the discussion that is supposed to provide an answer.

Perhaps the most radical position with respect to the institution of philosophy's agenda is that of classical scepticism. Since the days of Sextus Empiricus in classical antiquity, sceptics have taken the line that philosophy simply has no proper agenda at all—that philosophical issues are totally and altogether improper, illegitimate, intractable. David Hume's position was similar though not quite as radical. Settling questions of matter of empirical fact and formal issues relating to mathematics and logic apart, he regarded the remaining discussion of the philosophers as pointless twaddle that should be consigned to the flames. Philosophy's only proper job is to explain why this is so—to delineate and account for the powers and limits of the human understanding.

One of the most problematic and controverted issues regarding the agenda of philosophy is that of its boundaries with science. Some theorists take the view that philosophy is out of the picture once factual considerations enter in. As they see it, philosophy operates only in the realm of the a priori: whenever questions require factual materials for their satisfactory

resolution, then addressing them is "no longer doing philosophy". Bertrand Russell in one of his frequent puckish moods described the situation of philosophy as follows:

> As soon as definite knowledge concerning any subject becomes possible, this subject ceases to be called philosophy, and becomes a separate science. The whole study of the heavens, which now belongs to astronomy, was once included in philosophy; Newton's great work was called "the mathematical principles of natural philosophy." Similarly, the study of the human mind, which was a part of philosophy, has now been separated from philosophy and has become the science of psychology. ... Those questions which are capable of definite answers are placed in the sciences, while whose to which, at present, no definite answer can be given, remain to form the residue which is called philosophy.[1]

Russell's perspective projects an interesting prospect. In the eighteenth century "natural philosophy" (= physics) emigrated; in the nineteenth century "political philosophy" (economics); in the twentieth century "mental philosophy" (= psychology) and "linguistic philosophy" (= semantics). Perhaps epistemology, ethics, and the other branches of present day philosophy will eventually join the ranks of "definite knowledge" until philosophy comes to be out of a job altogether because all the problems will have been handed over to the positive sciences. Such a view of the situation in terms of an ongoing separation has it that philosophy's agenda is subject to a continual contraction that will ultimately reduce it to the vanishing point.

But this outcome seems unlikely because theory and fact—philosophy and science—intermingle and interpenetrate in their bearing upon the big philosophical issues that arise within natural science, political philosophy, psychology, and other fields. After all, questions about the range and limits of our knowledge regarding the nature of physical reality, about the basis of authority of the state, about the nature of and requisites for human happiness, and the like—were put on the agenda in classical antiquity and are still with us, calling now, as ever, for the philosophical elucidation of fact-laden issues. In general, philosophical problems relate to matters of interpretation which the scientific facts pose rather than resolve.

A characteristic feature of philosophical agendas deserves notice and indeed stress. For with respect to any item there are always two questions: Is it or is it not on the agenda? And if it is on the agenda, with what priority rendering does it occur there? For there is, of course, a difference—indeed

a noteworthy and portentous difference—between the priority items that figure high up on the agenda and the less significant items that occur further down. An agenda is not only a collection of items but an ordered list that prioritizes some over others. And where distinct rankings are concerned there is no way to compromise by "splitting the difference". Either A is a give a place prior to and more prominent than B or it is not. It may be possible to effect a *compromise* where different priority positions are concerned, but it lies in the nature of things that one cannot find a coordinative *combination* of them. Like oil and water, different priority schedules just do not mix.

Two rather different factors are at work in the matter of setting priority: importance and interest. The *importance* of a philosophical issue is evaluated in terms of how much lost by not having a correct answer to it—the difference that this absence makes in the larger scheme of things. Clearly, a great deal more turns on issues regarding the nature of rationality that hinge on matters in the philosophy of humor or of sport.

A problem's *interest*, in contrast to its importance, merely reflects the personal or collective inclinations of those who concern themselves with the issues involved. Interest hinges on the personal—and potentially idiosyncratic—concerns of people; importance is something more objective and impersonal, something that involves making a real difference in the larger scheme of things. Still, the fundamentally evaluative issue of the criteria property to be used in measuring this difference is—by its very nature—an indelibly philosophical question. And so in this regard too, determining the agenda of philosophy has to be seen as part and parcel of the subject itself.

2. THE RECENT SCENE

Simply having a view of a philosopher's agenda—and inventory of the questions and sub-questions that preoccupy him—tells volumes about that individual's substantive position. For the agenda provides a strong indication of what sorts of thing the individual thinks interesting, important, and worthwhile.

The concern of philosophers for the subject's agenda is vividly illustrated by the early 20th century's penchant for agenda-reducing positions. Indeed most of the century's major movements proposed reducing the agenda to nil. Logical positivism set out to eliminate virtually all of traditional philosophy and substitute natural science in its place. Analytic phi-

losophers and deconstructionists alike agreed with eliminationism, but opted for different replacements—the study of language in the former case and that of literature in the latter. Other schools, by contrast, were prepared to leave the subject more or less intact but fought for control of the agenda in ways that prioritized them in particular range of concern. Pragmatists—social concerns; feminists—woman's issues; etc.

However, apart from such doctrine-infused views as to how the agenda of philosophy *ought* to be constituted there stands the doctrine-external issue of how the business of the subject *is in fact* being pursued by the wider community of philosophical writers at large. What is at issue here is not the philosophically doctrinal perspective of "what constitutes proper philosophizing" but a descriptively bibliographic perspective regarding what philosophers are actually doing. It is, accordingly, not evaluatively normative but a factually descriptive issue that belongs in the hands of the students of philosophy rather than in those of the philosophers themselves.

When we look at the issue of agenda formation from this descriptive point of view, what most strikingly comes to view is the fact of agenda explosion—an enlargement that has engendered a revolutionizing of the structure of philosophy itself by way of taxonomic complexification. It is clear, for example, that the contemporary picture of taxonomic lay of the land in North America philosophy is thus vastly more complex and ramified than anything that has preceded it. The taxonomy of the subject has burst for good and all the bounds of the ancient tripartite scheme of logic, metaphysics and ethics. Specialization and division of labor runs rampant, and cottage industries are the order of the day. The situation has grown so complex and diversified that the most comprehensive recent English-language encyclopedia of philosophy[2] cautiously abstains from providing any taxonomy of philosophy whatsoever. (This phenomenon also goes a long way towards explaining why no one has written a comprehensive history of philosophy that carries through to the present-day scene.[3]) Philosophy—which ought by mission and tradition to afford an integration of knowledge—has itself become increasingly complex to the point of disintegration.

This situation illustrates the most characteristic feature of contemporary English-language philosophizing: the emphasis on detailed investigation of special issues and themes. In particular, the rapid growth of "applied philosophy"—that is, philosophical reflection about detailed issues in science, law, business, social affairs, computerized information processing, and the like—is a striking structural feature of contemporary North American phi-

losophy. In particular, the past three decades have seen a great proliferation of narrowly focused philosophical investigations of particular issues in areas such as economic justice, social welfare, ecology, abortion, population policy, military defense, and so on. For better or for worse, Anglophone philosophers have for much of the 20th century tended to stay away from large-scale abstract matters of wide and comprehensive scope, characteristic of the earlier era of Whitehead or Dewey, and nowadays incline to focus their investigations on issues of small-scale detail that relate to and grow out of those larger issues of traditional concern. The turning of philosophy from globally general, large-scale issues to more narrowly focused investigations of matters of microscopically fine-grained detail is a characteristic feature of American philosophy after World War II. Its flourishing use of the case-study method in philosophy is a striking phenomenon for which no one philosopher can claim credit—to a contemporary observer it seems like the pervasively spontaneous expression of "the spirit of the times".

In line with the increasing specialization and division of labor, Philosophy has become increasingly technical in character. Philosophy historians are increasingly preoccupied with matters of small-scale philosophical and conceptual microdetail. And philosophical investigations make increasingly extensive use of the formal machinery of semantics, modal logic, compilation theory, learning theory, etc. Ever heavier theoretical armaments are brought to bear on ever smaller problem-targets in ways that journal readers will occasionally wonder whether the important principle that technicalities should never be multiplied beyond necessity have been lost sight of. There is certainly no doubt that the increasing technicalization of philosophy has been achieved at the expense of its wider accessibility—and indeed even to its accessibility to members of the profession. The growth of the discipline has forced it beyond the limits of feasible surveillance by a single mind. After World War II it becomes literally impossible for American philosophers to keep up with what their colleagues were writing. No single thinker commands the whole range of knowledge and interests that characterizes present-day American philosophy, and indeed no single university department is so large as to have on its faculty specialists in every branch of the subject. The field has outgrown the capacity not only of its practitioners but even of its institutions.

It is, accordingly, one of the ironies of twentieth century philosophy that while the first half of the century saw a proliferation of movements that

sought to reduce the agenda, the second half of the century in fact witnessed an explosive expansion in the range of philosophical concerns.

3. METAPHILOSOPHY—A PART OF PHILOSOPHY ITSELF

Interestingly enough, this agenda-oriented issue of how the problem-field of philosophy is constituted is itself a decidedly philosophical question. And philosophy is almost unique in this respect. For here—and here virtually alone—the problem of how the discipline is constituted is one that belongs to the discipline itself. What the problems and issues of physics are is not a physical question (although, of course, only physicists can profitably deal with it). Nor is the question of what constitutes the subject-matter of grammar itself a grammatical question. But—unlike these cases—the question of what philosophy's problems in fact are is a philosophical question. What the proper mission of philosophy is is in fact one of the definitive and most significant issues of the field. And this means that metaphilosophy is a part and parcel of philosophy itself. The fact is that the make-up of its question agenda is one of the definitive aspects of any philosophical position, seeing that its agenda of questions is every bit as characteristic of such a position as is the body of its contentions.

It is not only the substantive theses, theories, and doctrines that afford insight into the make-up of a philosophical position, but no less important and determinative are its views about the questions and issues—its conception of the make-up and priority structure of the philosophical agenda. And this question of what the agenda of philosophy properly is—should actually be—is itself one of the crucial items on philosophy's agenda. Metaphilosophy, after all, is a component of philosophy, and what philosophy is all about and how it works (its nature, composition, methods, etc.) is itself an important part of philosophy. This helps to explain why philosophers commonly proceed from certain view of philosophical methodology—as consisting in logico-linguistic analysis, factual reduction, hermeneutic appraisal, etc.—to insist that issues not amenable to treatment by this technique simply do not belong on the agenda. (This in part is why no philosopher can feel altogether comfortable saying something like "Such and such an issue is really not very important in the larger scheme of things; it just happens to be something I am interested in.")

In fact, however, two different agendas are at issue: the *normatively* defined agenda of issues that philosophy ought to consider, and the *descriptively* defined agenda of issues that philosophers do in fact consider. And

in general the two go off in rather different directions. Indeed only for someone of the Hegelian persuasion that "the real is rational"—that what does happen in contexts of this sort is ipso facto normatively appropriate so that actuality here serves to determine propriety—will the two have to coincide. And such a coincidence would, clearly, itself simply reflect a certain particular philosophical position.

Descriptive metaphilosophy is not a part of philosophy at all. At this level we are dealing with a ranch of *factual* inquiry—with the history of philosophy and perhaps its sociology. It is a matter of the observational scrutiny of a certain enterprise within the wide framework of human intellectual endeavor. And this is primarily a branch of *historical* studies, not fundamentally dissimilar in spirit from that of characterizing the historical development of the conduct of warfare or of techniques of communication.

However, issues of how philosophy *should* be done—of significant *questions*, adequate *solutions*, and *good* arguments—is something very different.[4] And, obviously, this *normative* metaphilosophizing regarding the *correct* or *appropriate* problems, methods, and theses of philosophy is always a part of philosophy itself. That a certain way of doing philosophy is appropriate, successful, effective, superior, or the like—that philosophy is *properly* done in a certain way—is patently a philosophical thesis. And this sort of substantive philosophical contention itself turns on matters of cognitive evaluation and is thus bound to be every bit as controversial as any other issue of the field. What philosophy might "really" be is resolvable only within the framework of a philosophical position and cannot be settled extraphilosophically.[5] As Franz Kröner cogently put it: "The dialectic of 'intraphilosophical' and 'extraphilosophical' and of 'theoretical' with 'atheoretical' shows that given a finger philosophy at once takes the whole hand. It is an autonomous whole that provides its own boundaries."[6] The character of *genuinely* philosophical questions and the character of *successful* philosophical problem-solutions are thus themselves always potentially controversial issues of substantive philosophy.

The normative agenda represents a particular position's view of the matter. But philosophy-at-large is of course something greater than any particular position: it has to include the whole gamut of such positions. And so its view of the agenda is bound to be larger. But "its view" of course here means "its view as constituted from the *descriptive* standpoint". Philosophy-at-large does not—cannot—have any normative position. The taking of a doctrinal stance is—or thus as on any substantive philosophical issue—the exclusive prerogative of particular doctrinal posi-

tions. Philosophy-at-large takes no positions—only particular philosophical doctrines are able to do so. In philosophy as in politics there are only individual positions not collective ones—the community as a whole is too diversified, too balkanized for doctrinal coherence. We can say what philosophers teach, but not what philosophy teaches.

It is important to note that there is no possibility of reducing philosophy's substantive agenda to zero. For the question of what philosophy's agenda should be is always there. Even maintaining that it should be annihilated will—as long as not done dogmatically but rationally, i.e., philosophically—paradoxically yield an issue (viz. that of how philosophy is properly constituted) that figures upon philosophy's agenda. The fact that metaphilosophy is part of philosophy itself—and, specifically, that the question of the sort of questions that philosophy should be asking is itself a philosophical question—means that the philosophical agenda will never be entirely empty.

Even the most agenda-restrictive of philosophers must—just exactly because they have taken the issue of agenda reduction in hand—preoccupy themselves with philosophical issues. A radical philosophical scepticism—of the sort that appealed to the Pyrrhonist theory sceptics of classical antiquity—is a self-defeating position because it allows itself no locus standi for the rational defense of its pivotal own stance. In endeavoring to support its own position by reasons and arguments it vitiates its own thesis that reasoning and argumentations are always futile and unproductive in such theoretical matters. However reluctant agenda-reductive thinkers may be to acknowledge the meaningfulness of philosophical problems, they have no rationally defensible alternative but to acknowledge and confront at least some of them.

4. THE POLITICAL DIMENSION: A STRUGGLE FOR OWNERSHIP

Every philosophical system or school of thought has its own characteristic practice regarding the subject's agenda. The business of agenda setting in philosophy is by nature an ownership dispute—a battle for precedence or "right of way" of sorts when it comes to philosophical issues themselves. Controlling the agenda is a way of asserting a territorial claim in philosophy—of addressing the question: "Which doctrine's devotees can assert dominance—to whom does the discipline property belong?" The natural bias to philosophers to shape—to gerrymander, if your prefer—the agenda so as to fit their own pet theories and give priority and precedence

to those issues that it views as doctrinally central. The long and short of it is that struggle for control of the agenda is itself one of the prime modes of philosophical conflict.

What constitutes successful philosophizing is accordingly a matter of (perfectly legitimate) philosophical dispute. Theses about the *appropriate* nature, issues, methods, standards, and goals of philosophy are always philosophical themselves. This, in fact, is one of the characteristic features of the field as perhaps the only intellectual discipline the question of whose own nature itself constitutes one of its key problems.[7] Philosophy thus finds itself in a state of virtually *permanent* "foundation crisis" (*Grundlagenkrise*). There is always dispute and controversy about fundamentals. Neither method nor any other alternative resource provides a "neutral" Archimedean fulcrum for the weighing of philosophical issues. In particular there is no way of conjoining or combining philosophical agendas. For what is at issue is a matter of different principles and different value assessments. And there is no way to *combine* the view that A outranks B with one which has it that B outranks A.

The fact is that this sort of communal agenda is flatly incoherent. For given the plausibility and diversity of opinions within the community at large, the questions that will constitute its "agenda" will be based on incompatible presuppositions. After all, no initially coherent register of question can compare incompatibilities, as per:

- Since man's mind is a machine, how is to that the illusion of free will can arise?

- How does the fact that moral judgments are objectively valid demonstrate the necessity of free will?

The question register of philosophy at large is not a coherent agenda but a mere catalogue.

The most striking feature of the community's situation is disagreement on the issues' lack of substantial conclusive means, that it does not offer an answer to the questions but a plurality of different and discordant answers. For the community need not (and will not) "make up its mind" among conflicting alternatives. This, however, is something the individual must do. The weight of rationality—of consistency and coordination—bears down upon the individual in a way that the community in its aggregate totality cannot and will not reflect.

The situation here is distinctly reminiscent of that of politics, and the fact is that philosophy at large exhibits a certain "political" aspect because the struggle to set philosophy's question agenda is in effect a dispute for territorial dominance, a "turf war" of sorts. Philosophizing thus has an inescapable "political" (as it were) dimension. Philosophers would fain be in a position to dictate the agenda, taking the line (however discretely or even tacitly) that "my issues are the ones that have top priority". To articulate a philosophical position is to engage in an imperialism of sorts. For half the battle, so to speak, lies in managing to set the agenda, to be in a position to determine the rules of conflict by delimiting the shape of the battlefield. Its declaration regarding some discussion that "this just isn't really doing philosophy (as it should be done)" is in general deeply revelatory about the substance of any philosophical discussion.

5. THE SYSTEMIC DIMENSION

To be sure, philosophers do not like being reminded that the question of the agenda is itself out there as an object of concern. They like the comforting feeling that their own substantial position has already managed to settle all that. To have to defend not only its overt substance but also its implicit metaphilosophy is a task they do not welcome. But of course they cannot on good conscience avoid it, seeing that the inherent coordination between substance and agenda obviously renders such a tactic is of very doubtful legitimacy.

Philosophizing is an inherently reflective discipline. Here, if anywhere, we have to be concerned about what we are doing in the conscientious endeavor to provide a cogent rationale for doing it our way. And seeing that metaphilosophy is inescapably a part of philosophy itself—posing such concludes such synoptic issues as the mission of the enterprise and its overall question agenda—the conscientious philosopher has no alternative but to proceed systematically to assure the consonance of practice and theory, of doctrinal substance and methodological procedure.

This facet of the situation constitutes yet another valid reason why philosophy has to be developed systematically. The fully adequate development of any philosophical position has to take into view the holistic issue of how its own deliberations fit into the larger scheme of things. They should make manifest how its practice exemplifies rather than contradicts its proceedings and how its presuppositions manage to do justice to those issues which, of its own telling, are the most crucial. This business of

showing how its own deliberations fit into a proper understanding of the nature of things is a crucial part of philosophical systematization. Any philosophy that neglects it—that fails to provide a suitable rationale not only for its own doctrines but for its own modus operandi—does so at the price of its own adequacy.[8]

* * *

The salient lesson of such considerations regarding the agenda of philosophy is that philosophically significant questions have substantive philosophical presuppositions. The constitution of a philosophical agenda accordingly cannot be separated from position-taking in substantive philosophical matters. And so, how philosophers configure the manifold of issues that figure on their agenda provides a synoptic view of the doctrinal structure that they propose to take on the substantive issues of the field.

NOTES

1 Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), p. 240. Émile Boutroux similarly remarked earlier (in 1911) that once we have found a definitive resolution to a problem we thereby show, retrospectively as it were, that it was not a *philosophical* problem at all—it is the persistence of philosophical problems that marks them as such. Quoted in Franz Kröner, *Die Anarchie der philosophischen Systeme* (Leipzig: Ausg. Photomechan. Nachdr, 1929; rpt. Graz: Akadem. Druck- u. Verlagsanst, 1970), p. 185.

2 *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Paul Edwards (London and New York: Macmillan, 1967).

3 John Passmore's *Recent Philosophers* (La Salle, 1985) is as close as anything we have, but—as the very title indicates—this excellent survey makes no pretensions to comprehensiveness. In this direction an earlier multi-person survey went somewhat further, exemplifying what is the best and most that one can hope to obtain: Roderick M. Chisholm et. al., *Philosophy: Princeton Studies of Humanistic Scholarship in America* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1964). Yet not only does this book attest to the fragmentation of the field—but it conveys (from its Foreword onwards) the defeatist suggestion that whatever larger lessons can be extracted from an historically minded scrutiny of the substantive diversity of the contemporary situation are destined to lie substantially in the eyes of the beholder.

4 This point is forcibly argued by Robert Nozick: "A metaphilosophy will be part of a total philosophical view rather than a separate neutral theory above the battle"

NOTES

(*Philosophical Explanations* [Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1981], p. 19).

5 This is the burden of Franz Kröner's dictum that "there is no such thing as philosophy *überhaupt*" (*Die Anarchie*, op. cit., p. 59).

6 Ibid., p. 273.

7 See Arthur Danto, *What Philosophy Is* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 2; also Richard Rorty, *The Linguistic Turn*, op. cit., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 1-2.

8 This chapter draws upon an essay of the same title in the author's *Philosophical Reasoning* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 33-44.

Chapter 5

THE PERSONALIA
Referential Analysis in Philosophy

One of the most characteristic and in some ways revealing features of philosophical authorship is the way in which philosophers take the views of others into account in their own deliberations. For all of them tend to pursue their own projects and positions in a way that bears relationships to that of others, nevertheless they all have their own characteristic way of operating in point of dependence on or indifference in this regard. And in this regard, next to knowing the questions being addressed, perhaps the most revealing nondoctrinal index of a philosopher's way of thinking is the inventory of thinkers he considers and the way in which he does so. A good deal of insight into the tenor and tendency of a philosopher's tendency of thinking is afforded by seeing whom he takes notice of and whom he ignores, whom he respects and whom he scorns.

Every philosophical writer has what might be called a referential horizon of others whose work is taken into account. The structure of this field and the nature of its composition afford instructive insight into this philosopher's way of thinking about the issues.

This matter of authorial attention—of a thinker's sources of inspiration and foci of opposition—can be pursued either in the philosopher's corpus in general or in the context of a particular work. It is only the second perspective that will be at issue here. A great deal will, of course, depend on just what sort of philosophical work is under consideration. Obviously, an historical study—and in particular one devoted to the life and thought of a single philosopher—is bound to have a rather narrow author-reference focus, with comparatively few individuals being the target of a substantial proportion of the references. But our concern here is not with such works of history-of-philosophy scholarship but rather with works of creative philosophizing.

From this standpoint it transpires that the information afforded by the name index of a philosophical book reveals its author in an illuminating and not always flattering light. (That, perhaps, is why many philosophical writers do not trouble to have one.) Different philosophers have different—and sometimes rather eccentric—views on the subject of name indexes.

For example, F. H. Bradley in the prefatory note to the index of his *Appearance and Reality* suggested that if one did not find the index helpful one should simply ignore it. His index then went on to offer no entries whatever for proper names—a circumstance that managed to obscure the fact that virtually half of the personal mentions in the book refer to Bernard Bosanquet.

A striking example of an author with an idiosyncratic personal-reference policy is G. F. W. Hegel. Thus in the opening section ("Consciousness") of his *Phenomenology of Mind*, a segment of some 60 pages, there is not a single mention of any philosophical author (unless we are willing to regard a somewhat oblique reference to Goethe as an exception to this rule). At the other extreme stands the G. W. Leibniz of the *Theodicy*, who was always painstaking in taking note of the relevant works of his predecessors and contemporaries, and moreover also remarked that it was the points of agreement rather than disagreement that alluded his particular attention. The referential horizons of different philosophers are very differently constituted. Some authors only refer to those they deem congenial, other are more "objective" and mention everyone who has something significant to say on their subject.

The idea of the author-reference practice of different philosophical authors yields a varied spectrum of ideal types. In this light we could encounter:

- The Loner

  This is the author who pretends to a spurious self-sufficiency mentioning neither predecessors whose cognate ideas should be acknowledged nor opponents whose views are being opposed. (In the extreme there is also The Solipsist who cites no-one but himself.)

- The Cultural Chauvinist

  This author will mention only fellow countrymen or cultural congeners, seeing no need to take account of the views of national or ideological foreigners. (A special case of this is The Rewarder who only mentions others when giving a pat on the back to those whose views are approved of.)

- The Complainer

  Such an author only mentions the people who, as he sees it, get it all wrong. Only opponents are ever taken into account.

- The Olympian

  He dwells among the acknowledge giants. Only the great—and in general only the late great dead—are ever mentioned: the lesser mortals who deal with the issues under consideration are never taken into account.

- The Bibliophile

  This is the author who aims at bibliographic completeness. Virtually anyone who has said anything on the subject at issue—be its importance and relevance great or small—will receive mention. (This sort of thing is pretty much par for the course with German habilitation theses.)

- The Classicist

  Such an author deems only the greats of classical antiquity to be worthy of mention.

- The Avant Gardist

  Such and author is fixated on le dernier cri, and will mention only the latest contributors whose works are hot off the press.

- The Necromancer

  This is the author who deems only the dead as worthy of mention. Living contemporaries are strictly off limits.

To be sure, one and the same author can use different reference strategies in different contexts. In the logical works, where he sees himself treading virgin ground, Aristotle cites no predecessors but begins with

definitions and classifications: while in the *Physics*, where much earlier work exists, he begins by making a survey of it.

To be sure, author-citations are not created equal—and certainly not so in the case of philosophy. But of course it lies in the nature of statistics to blur differences, and in the present case as in so many others statistical information can—despite real shortages—nevertheless prove to be informative, in providing instructive insights into the modus operandi of different philosophical expositors.

The ensuing appendix looks at a handful of important philosophical books in the light of referential analysis. Fortunately, none of these conform rigidly and altogether to any one of these various extreme types.

APPENDIX

The following statistical parameters will serve to provide a basis.

P = the total number of pages of the text at issue.[1]

N = the total number of authors referenced in the text. These authors constituted part of the writer's overall authorial horizon. The AUTHORIAL RANGE of a work is accordingly larger or smaller in line with the magnitude of N.

n = the total number of author-referencings (some authors will of course be mentioned more than once).

The attached tabulation sets out these several statistics for some baker's dozen of philosophical classics.

The size of its citation universe (N) reflects the scholarly aspirations of a book. Here Gadamer carries off the prize (at 358) with Leibniz a close second (at 316) with Rawls as a distant third (at 280). At the rear of the line come Goodman (with 13) and Wittgenstein (with 10). One would be tempted to make a division between the technical and the scholarly, were it not for Leibniz. And if the number of authors cited per page (N/P) is an index of scholarly depth, then Schopenhauer wins out, with Leibniz again a distant second (and Whitehead and Kant tied for losers).

The REFERENCE RATE of a work can be measured either by the average number of author-references per page (N/P) or by the average number of referrings per page (n/P). The number of author citations (n/P) could be

called the name-dropping quartet, and here Dewey, Goodman, and Kant are the only author with less than one-third.

As the data given below indicates, some writers (e.g. Cassirer, Gadamer, Schopenhauer, Whitehead) do not let a page get past them without a reference, while others (Goodman, Dewey) are happy to go along for three or four pages before referring to some philosopher or other. Other things equal, the ratio N/P will gives an indication of the depth of a philosophical writer's scholarship. (Observe that Schopenhauer and Leibniz top our list in this respect while Kant stands at the bottom, illustrating his own contempt for those who commit the error of mistaking the history of philosophy for philosophy as such.)

The ratio *N*/*n* reflects the REFERENTIAL DIFFUSION of a philosopher over his authorial range.

With any numerical parameter that measures some feature of the members of a "population" there will be three descriptive ranges; the *norm* within which the majority (say two thirds) of the population falls, and the two extreme of *shortfall* and *excess* that characterize the rest. The three components of the overall range may be characterized as ~, +, and -, respectively.

Thus with referential diffusion at issue with *N*/*n* for example we have it that the norm is defined by 50 % with overall range generally running from .35 to .65 Here the shortfall range includes Gadamer, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein, and by contrast, the excess range includes Kant, Dewey, and Whitehead. The latter group has a more concentrated focus on its discussants, concentrating more heavily on a few; the latter group derives the opposite.

The list of rather large books ($P > 400$) includes those of Gadamer, Heidegger, Leibniz, Rawls, Russell, and Whitehead. The list of those extensive referential contact range ($n > 500$) includes Gadamer, Leibniz, Rawls, and Whitehead. So only Heidegger seems out of step here. The books whose name-dropping index (n/P) is greater than one include those of Cassier, Gadamer, Leibniz, Rawls, Schopenhauer, Whitehead, and Wittgenstein.

Let us designate as an α-referent (read: "alpha-referent") those authors who constitute the core of the philosopher's authorial reference focus by way of receiving over twice the average number of mentions. We then adopt the definition:

A = the number of the writer's α-authors, that is, the number of authors who received twice the average number of mentions (that is, more than 2n/N references).

Accordingly, a rather comparably informative parameter is a text's INDEBTEDNESS QUOTIENT (A/N), which is defined as follows:

A/N = the percentage of the authors referenced that account for half of all referrings (that is, for a total on n/2 referrings).

Mostly the parameter A/N stands at around 15 percent. Seeing that for none of our books is it less than 9 % and only in three cases is it as much as 20 (Cassierer, Dewey, Wittgenstein). In only one case (Gadamer) was it (significantly) less—indicating an eagerness to touch all the bases. But in general, no matter how many people get cited, the discussion centers around a few.

Since that A/N generally lies in the range from 10 to 20 % we have it that as a rule

$$A = .15\ N \pm .05N$$

On this basis, we would expect that N ordinarily stands at around seven times A so that: $N \cong 7A$. The clearest exceptions to this rule are the big-N authors: Gadamer, Leibniz, and Rawls. (And in this context Cassierer is in an exception-class by himself.)

However, some philosophers are eager to situate themselves in a tradition and accordingly go out of their way to cite its representatives. (In this vein, writers with comparatively small (A/N)-values (less than 10 %) include Gadamer, Leibniz, Rawls, and Schopenhauer.) Other philosophers try to be widely encompassing and touch many bases. Thus how a philosopher conceives of the nature of his project and how he chooses to pursue its execution will clearly exert a great deal of influence upon the constitution of his referential horizon. They who see themselves as radical innovators may well proceed in the manner of the Loner (e.g. Wittgenstein), while those who see themselves as standard-bearers of a vast tradition (e.g. Gadamer) are likely to incline to being something of a Bibliographer.

It seems worth observing that the following philosophers make the appearance on the α-lists of at least three of our sixteen philosophers: Aristotle (11), Carnap (3), Descartes (6), Goethe (3), Hegel (6), Hume (7), Kant

(11), Leibniz (4), Locke (5), Newton (3), Plato (10), Russell (3), Spinoza (5). It is clear that Aristotle and Kant are tied for the title of α-list champion with Plato close behind. It is particularly noteworthy that Kant figures on the α-list of every one of the philosophers after his own day save for two, namely Goodman and James.

In these statistics individual citations have been counted indiscriminately, irrespective of whether they invoke a favorable or an unfavorable invocation. Admittedly, it would be revealing to make a discrimination here. For example, while Aristotle receives six mentions in Russell's Human Knowledge, in each case his name is associated with what Russell condemns as an erroneous belief.

A pretty clear lesson for academic instruction in philosophy is inherent in these referential statistics. After all, in coming to understand a philosopher it cannot but help to have some knowledge of the works that impel this thinker to approbation or refutation. In this light it would appear that a basic program in the history of philosophy would consist minimally of five courses

1. Ancient philosophy: Plato-Aristotle

2. Combinated Rationalism: Descartes-Leibniz-Spinoza

3. British Empiricism: Locke-Hume

4. Kant

5. 19th century—and especially Hegel

6. 20th century—and especially Carnap and Russell

The principal surprise here is that our statistics indicate that perhaps Goethe should be on the required list of the 19th century philosophers.

SOME REFERENTIAL STATISTICS

Philosopher/ Book	P	N	n	N/n	N/P	n/P	A	A/N
Ayer (*Language, Truth and Logic*)	184	49	129	.38	.27	0.70	7	14 %
α's: Berkeley, Carnap, Hume, Kant, Moore, Popper (38), Russell (Note: these α-lists are alphabetic.)								
Bergson (*Creative Evolution*)	300	102	259	.39	.34	0.87	10	10 %
α's: Aristotle, Darwin, Descartes, Galileo, Kant, Leibniz, Plato, Plotinus, Spencer, Spinoza								
Cassirer (*Essay on Man*)	308	165	393	.42	.54	1.26	46	28 %
α's: Aristotle (14), Kant (14), plus 44 others								
Collingwood (*Essay on Metaphysics*)	290	80	186	.43	.28	0.90	10	13 %
α's: Aristotle, Descartes, Hegel, Hume, Kant (17), Mill, Newton, Plato, Russell, Spinoza								
Dewey (*Reconstruction in Philosophy*)	164	35	54	.65	.21	0.32	7	20 %
α's: Aristotle (17), F. Bacon, Bentham, Hegel, Kant, Locke, Plato								
Gadamer (*Truth and Method*)	640	358	1197	.30	.56	1.85	26	7 %
α's: Aristotle (61), Betti, Descartes, Dilthey, Droysen, Fichte, Goethe, Habermas, Hegel, Heidegger, W. Humboldt, Husserl, Kant, Leibniz, Nicholas of Cusa, Nietzsche, Plato, Ranke, Schelling, Schiller, Schlegel, Schleirmacher, Socrates, Vico, Winckelmann, Yorck								
Goodman (*Fact, Fiction , and Forecast*)	85	13	27	.48	.15	0.32	3	23 %
α's: Carnap, Hempel (7), M. White								
Heidegger (*Being and Time*)	440	61	216	.28	.14	0.49	9	15 %

α's: Aristotle (35), Augustine, Dilthey, Hegel, Husserl, Kant, Plato, Scheler

James (*Pragmatism*)	135	42	66	.64	.31	0.49	4	10 %

α's: FSC Schiller (7), Bradley, Papini, Royce

Kant (*Critique of Judgment*)	343	30	45	.67	.09	0.13	3	10 %

α's: Epicurus (5), Hume, Spinoza (5)

Leibniz (*Theodicy*)	472	316	615	.51	.67	1.30	27	9 %

α's: Aquinas, Aristotle, Arnauld, St. Augustine (20), Calvin, Cicero, Descartes, Epicurus, Grotius, Hobbes, Jacquelot, Jurien, Lactantius, LeClerc, Locke, Luther, Malebranche, Molina, Nicole, Plato, Pliny, Duns Scotus, Strato, Vergil, Wyclif

Rawls (*Theory of Justice*)	560	280	628	.45	.50	1.12	24	9 %

α's: Aristotle, K. J. Arrow, B. Barry, W. Baumol, Bentham, Brandt, Edgeworth, Foot, Hardie, Hart, Hume, Kant (23), Luce, Marx, Mill, Perry, Raiffa, Ross, Rousseau, Sen, Sidwick (23), Adam Smith, Urmson, B. Williams

Russell (*Human Knowledge*)	610	79	204	.39	.13	0.33	14	18 %

α's: Aristotle, Carnap, Descartes, Eddington, Einstein, Hegel, Hume, Kant, Keynes, Laplace, Leibniz (16), Newton, Plato, Reichenbach

Schopenhauer (*On the Basis of Morality*)	191	149	279	.53	.78	1.45	14	9 %

α's: Aristotle, Fichte, Goethe, Horace, Kant (20), Locke, Plato, Pythagoras, Schelling, Schiller, Seneca, Spinoza, Voltaire, Wolff

Whitehead (*Process and Reality*)	502	45	534	.68	.09	1.06	7	16 %

α's: Aristotle, Descartes, Hume (126), Kant, Locke, Newton, Plato

Wittgenstein (*Tractetus Logico-Philosophicus*)	56	10	57	.18	.18	1.02	2	20 %

α's: Russell (28), Frege

APPENDIX
(FOR REFERENTIAL ANALYSIS)

#1
Problematic Silence

A good deal of information can be obtained about the tendency and position of a philosophical publication simply by knowing this sort of thing about the authors discussed or cited.

Referential analysis can lead to interesting typological groupings. Some authors refer only to opponents, others only to congeners. Some writers refer solely to the great dead. (A. N. Whitehead would break this rule only for personal friends.) Others refer only to contemporaries, or sometimes only to countrymen. Even writers on justice often do not trouble to do justice to those of their fellow theorists to whom they are indebted.

The philosophical literature has unquestionably become too large in recent years to permit anything like a general survey of discussions relevant to most significant problems. But surely the author who simply makes no real effort in this direction is delinquent. In particular, if he avoids any mention of the sources of his inspiration, he is an ingrate (if not worse). And in general one becomes hung on the horns of a dilemma in neglecting "the literature". If one is simply unaware of relevant discussions, then one's professional competence is called into question. If one deliberately omits mention of relevant discussions because they are not written by members of one's own school or group, then one betrays pettiness and provincialism. All such failings betoken a regrettable betrayal of sound standards. In philosophy parochiolism is even less excusable than elsewhere.

Philosophy, too, has its nonpersons. The natural habitat of academic nonpersons is in the spaces between footnotes; they are prominent through their absence. Like the servants in an old-world mansion, they are part of the unnoticed background, victims to the pretense that they do not exist at all. We sense that they are there but do not hear from them. However useful their contribution, it is made in unnoticed silence.

Yet this sort of thing is literally irresponsible. Authors on scholarly subjects surely have a responsibility to inform their readers not just about their own views but also about the state of the art. Of course, we are free to criticize what we mention, or even to dismiss it with scorn. But simply to ignore a substantially relevant contribution is, however understandable,

nevertheless inexcusable. It is accordingly a salutary and illuminating exercise for philosophical authors who think a paper (or book) that they are working on to be completed to take up the manuscript once more, and carry out a referential analysis to see if what has in fact been done in this regard reflects the actual intentions at work.

A philosopher's silences can be pregnant with interest. They may, of course, simply reflect conceptual inaccessibilities: Aristotle could obviously not discuss the philosophical ramifications of quantum theory. Then, too, they may merely betoken a want of time or of information. But they may also indicate something more weighty—an overt decision to ignore, a judgment of unimportance, an explicit dismissal of concern.

What can excuse silence? For one thing, it could be a theory on which there is nothing viable (true, appropriate) to be said on the topic at issue. Examples are afforded by the view positivists take of metaphysics, or again by the position of skeptics toward philosophical doctrines in general. But from the true philosopher one would expect not mere silence but explanation. Why should it be that an issue is unimportant; why should it be seen as uninteresting; or why should it be deemed worthy of dismissal? The philosopher as philosopher owes us an account. In philosophizing there can be errors of omission as well as errors of commission; not only can a philosopher's claims be wrong but his silences can be inappropriate. Not only can we disagree with what a philosopher says, but we can reproach him or her for discreditable silences as well.

In this light, consider the situation of women in matters of philosophy. Feminist historians of philosophy provide constant reminders of the extent to which philosophers from Plato and Aristotle onward have cast aspersions on women. There are notable exceptions, although, prior to J. S. Mill, they generally manifest themselves rather by silence than explicit argumentation. An example is Leibniz, who on a personal plane held various women in high esteem in point of intellectual capacity, and who was in any case too astute a courtier to articulate views that would be offensive to the several highnesses with whom he dealt on a daily basis. When such writers discuss persons without bringing women explicitly into the discussion, it is presumably not because they dismiss the gender *en gros*, but because they see it as self-evident that their remarks about people in general pertain to men and women indifferently.

NOTES

1 Of course there are large pages and small pages. For present purposes a page is normalized to 400 words.

Chapter 6

THE TYPOLOGY
Elements of Philosophical Taxonomy

1. THE KANTIAN BACKGROUND

One important resource of textual interpretation is afforded by classification in point of a descriptive taxonomy. Such pigeon-holing forms part of a larger project, one that roots in the post-Renaissance conception of systematicity in its orientation towards specifically cognitive or knowledge-organizing systems. The explicit theory of such cognitive systems was launched during the second half of the 18th century, and the principal theoreticians were two German contemporaries: Johann Heinrich Lambert (1728-1777)[1] and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804).[2] The practice of systematization that lay before their eyes was that of the great 17th-century philosopher-scientists: Descartes, Spinoza, Newton, Leibniz, and the subsequent workers of the Leibnizian school—especially Christian Wolff. The main use of the system-concept in all these later writers relates not to its application to material things, but to its specifically cognitive applications to the organization of human knowledge.[3]

The use of a rationally coordinated taxonomy is of course a prime tool of such systematization. For this instrumentality makes it possible to coordinate various elements in a way that brings their cognitive interrelationships to light. Kant's insistence on the a priori classification of the materials of any inquiry accordingly formed part and parcel of his generalized commitment to architectonic, to rational coordination. In this regard, as in so many others, Kant's initial approach to issues reflects the position of the Wolffian school.

Among the cognitive disciplines that Kant insisted on viewing in this systemic and taxonomic light is philosophy itself. He was emphatically not content with a merely chronological and historical approach for the study of metaphysical doctrines, but prescribed that rational order should also be introduced into the historical proliferation of philosophical systems by means of a rationally explicated taxonomy of positions.[4] The idea of a (philosophical) systematization of (philosophical) systems was a guiding factor in Kant's thought and presently influenced the next generation.

Accordingly, in the section on "The Refutation of Idealism" of his first Critique, Kant elaborated a distinction between problematic, dogmatic, and transcendental idealism useful in distinguishing his own position from that of his predecessors. And in the section on the "History of Pure Reason", he elaborated a tripartite cross-classification in line with three issues:

(1) Do the objects of metaphysical concern become cognitively accessible to us through sensation ("sensualism", e.g. Epicurus) or through reflection ("intellectualism", e.g. Plato)?

(2) Is our knowledge of these objects primarily based on experience ("empiricism", e.g. Aristotle, Locke) or on reason ("rationalism", e.g. Plato, Leibniz)?

(3) Is the method of investigation by which the knowledge of these objects is established primarily one of observation ("naturalism" or "common sensism", e.g. Reid) or is it a matter of scientific theorizing ("scientism", e.g. Classical Atomism, Descartes, Leibniz)? This last, scientific approach, Kant further divided into his "dogmatism" (Wolff), "scepticism" (Hume) and the "criticalism" of his own position.

Note that these issues are all of a fundamentally epistemological nature, geared to the epistemology of metaphysical inquiry, an approach which typifies Kant's recourse to cognitive mechanisms inherent in the resources of the human mind.

To be sure, Kant himself—being concerned in his own philosophy to abolish metaphysics rather than to categorize it—did not proceed very far with this venture. For Kant, the very process of classifying philosophical positions is, in a way, a discouraging exercise. It is a systematic survey all right, but a survey of the possibilities of error. From Kant's own doctrinal standpoint, the history of metaphysical speculation provides no more than infinita philosophiae falsae exempla: the classificatory architectonic of metaphysics surveys alternative possible answers to questions that are based on false presuppositions. To Kant's mind, the taxonomy of metaphysics ultimately represents the architecture of error—the construction of a building destined for collapse.

But where Kant's own position towards metaphysical taxonomy was largely negative, his successors turned concern for systematization to a more positive direction.

2. THE COUNTER-REVOLUTION: TIEDEMANN

Kant's younger contemporary Dietrich Tiedemann (1748-1803), who taught philosophy at Marburg, took a different line. An historian of philosophy endowed with a deep respect for the historical tradition, Tiedemann emphasized the importance of a comprehensive survey of alternative positions.[5] Tiedemann saw himself as an improving continuator of the tradition of Jacob Brucker, an historian who had sought to present a comprehensive survey of alternative positions—based not on abstract principles of rational interconnection, but on a survey of the concrete historical kinships. Keenly opposed to any sort of aprioristic formalism, Tiedemann insisted on the need to use the actual course of historical development as our guide in devising a systematic survey of philosophical systems.

Against his Kantian critics, Tiedemann maintained that there is not (and perhaps never can be) any single set of appropriate standards for ordering or evaluating philosophical systems a priori, and held that the survey of such systems must consequently proceed on historical rather than rational principles: whatever classificatory order there is should emerge from the historical data rather than being imposed upon them ab extra from some aprioristic point of view. As Tiedemann saw it, the idea of a rational taxonomy of philosophical systems is an unattainable illusion, because—short of imposing our own philosophy on the historical facts—we have no prospect of having them back to some fundamental source inherent in the time spent as such.[6] No extra-historical, purely natural point of view is available to us: no philosophical taxonomy is given absolutely by pure reason alone. Tiedemann accordingly rejected the Kantian approach root and branch.

3. A KANTIAN RENOVATOR: CARUS

Friedrich August Carus (1770-1807) taught philosophy in Leipzig. Though his death at a relatively early age deprived him of the opportunity to develop his ideas fully, his posthumous *Ideen zur Geschichte der Philosophie* (Leipzig, 1809) was an important and influential work.[7] Following in Kant's footsteps, he was not content with chronological treatment or historical periodization, but insisted on the quest for a strictly rational, substantively determined categorization.

For guidance here, Carus turned to Fichte, under whose influence he adopted as basis for classification the familiar tripartite scheme:

—Positive affirmation: thetic or dogmatic

—Negative denial: antithetic or agnostic

—Mediative combination: synthetic or critical

Applying this approach, Carus proceeded to classify philosophical positions in terms of the sort of answers that a metaphysical position gives to the fundamental questions of the field. The following sketch gives an idea of his approach:

(A) What are the sources of knowledge? Its ultimate source is

1. experience: Empiricism

2. reason: Rationalism

3. mixed: Electicism

(B) How is knowledge related to its object? The connection is such that

1. our knowledge is of things as they exist independently of our thought: Realism

2. our knowledge is of mere thought-things: Idealism

3. our knowledge is of real things but not as they really exist: Criticism

(C) How diverse are the world's building blocks? They are

1. of one sort only (be it material or mental): Monism

2. of several sorts (e.g. the material and the mental): Dualism and Pluralism

3. unfathomable: Scepticism

(D) How pervasive is the causal relationship among things? It

1. is all-pervasive: Determinism

2. leaves room for the occasional intervention of chance and lapses from causality: Indeterminism

3. seems all-pervasive according to our historical thinking but is in fact a mere fiction (Hume): Causal Scepticism

The list can be prolonged (e.g. as regards such topics as the role of God, fate, free will, etc.) But the general idea is clear enough. The approach Carus endorsed begins with an inventory of the major issues and then proceeds to survey the possible alternative answers to these questions in the light of a tripartite division: yes/no/yes-and-no.

4. HEGEL

Carus sought to develop taxonomic principles in an endeavor to reveal rational order in the historic process. Hegel, in effect, carried this approach to an extreme. He saw the history of philosophy not as illustrating an underlying rational order, but as constituting such an order. To his mind, the temporal order of historical developments actually establishes a rational order, in that each stage or moment in a succession of historical values should be regarded as an element in a classification. Historical order provides rational order. Classification is to emerge from periodization. As Hegel saw it, the history of philosophy is the unfolding of a logical dynamic inherent in productive reason exfoliating in successive stages or phases the organic development of philosophical thought in a manner analogous to the development of a human being through infancy, childhood, and adolescence to maturity. Here, the taxonomic project is absorbed into the historical one: the successive stages or moments of historical development are simply reconceptualized as elements in a classification.

From the standpoint of taxonomy, this Hegelian approach represents a highly ambiguous development. For one can view it either (1) as a perfecting of the taxonomic project by implementing it in concrete application to historical materials, or (2) as an abandonment of the taxonomic project and its replacement by an historical periodization. From the second point of

view taxonomy simply disappears, being sunk without trace in the ocean of historiography.

5. THE RECOVERY OF TAXIS: DILTHEY AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL TURN

With Dilthey too the history of metaphysics affords the key to its taxonomy—but in a manner very different from and explicitly antithetical to Hegel's. For Dilthey rejects the idea of an orderly sequential progress through successive phases that is the mainstay of the Hegelian view. He regards the conflict between different systems not as a unified ebb and flow moving in the direction of a higher synthesis, but as a real, persistent, and ineliminable conflict. Where Hegel envisioned an eventual supercession of conflict in a coherent unity imposed by reason in its inexorable movement towards a single coherent, all-embracing system, Dilthey held that there are three incomparable styles or approaches to philosophical thought:

> naturalism: reality is seen in thing-oriented terms, as a matter of inert constituents functioning in complex but essentially "mechanical" interaction. [PHYSICAL AGENCY provides the key to metaphysical understanding.]
>
> subjective idealism: the idealism of individual free agency [THE WILL of human beings provides the key to metaphysical understanding.]
>
> objective idealism: the idealism of a universal, impersonal reason at work in nature [REASON provides the key to metaphysical understanding.]

Dilthey regarded these three approaches as metaphysical perspectives or positions that have pervaded the history of philosophy from its beginning and will persist ineliminably throughout the future. As he saw the matter, no one of these approaches will ever prevail to the exclusion and destruction of the rest. For the reality is too complex and many-sided to constitute a coherent systemic whole. There is always room for discordant tendencies of thought. Systems are diverse because they are expressions of human nature and human nature is diverse. Even as the world of human action contains and combines people of very different personalities without any ulti-

mate unification, so the world of human thought contains and combines systems of different commitments without any prospect of ultimate unification.

At this stage of the deliberations, it became sensible to see the diversity of philosophical thought as rooted in the diversity of philosophizing thinkers. And this invites the transition to a psychological approach. This invitation was soon accepted.

With the emergence of scientific psychology in the latter part of the 19th century, several theorists sought to classify metaphysical positions on the basis of the psychological attitudes or orientations that incline people in their favor. Various theorists came to envision a taxonomy of philosophical positions in terms of the temperament and psychological disposition of the people who are "naturally drawn" to such a position.

Perhaps, the most familiar instance of this approach is William James' distinction between the "tough minded" and the "tender minded" approaches to philosophical positions.[8]

The Tender-Minded	*The Tough-Minded*
Rationalistic (going by "principles"),	Empiricist (going by "facts"),
Intellectualistic,	Sensationalistic,
Idealistic,	Materialistic,
Optimistic,	Pessimistic,
Theistic,	Atheistic,
Voluntaristic (free-willist),	Fatalistic,
Monistic,	Pluralistic,
Dogmatical.	Sceptical.

James' idea is that pragmatism (and "pragmatic mindedness") provides us with a third option—a mediating alternative. His philosophical outlook operates in a world without extremism: its principle is the idea that wherever one can draw a clear contrast between radically opposed philosophical options, the truth lies somewhere in between.

6. THE ENCYCLOPEDIC TURN

A variant major impetus to taxonomy in metaphysics proceeds not from the internal requirements of philosophizing itself, or the historical survey of philosophical teachings, but from encyclopedism—the endeavor to provide an impartially externalized description of the discipline. A good ex-

ample of this approach is afforded by the article on "Metaphysics" in Rudolf Eisler's *Handwörterbuch der Philosophie*.[9] Eisler's classification of positions is based on an inventory of the basic questions (Grundprobleme) that define the tasks of the discipline, followed by a blocking out of the possible answers to their questions:

1. What is the character of the basic building-blocks of nature?

—uni-modal: Monism

matter as basic: Materialism

mind as basic: (Spiritualism)

—as compositional basis (psychologistic reductionism, panpsychism) [Berkeley]

—as explanatory basis (explanatory idealism) [Kant]

—as provider of the basic building blocks, namely ideas (thoughts as basic): Idealism, a neutral, mixed basis (Neutral Monism)

—bi-modal: Dualism

mind/matter dualism

—multi-modal: Pluralism

2. Is there a God—and if so what is His nature?

—Atheism

—Theism

—Monotheism

—Polytheism

—Pantheism

3. How are natural occurrences interrelated?

—Causal determinism

—Mechanism

—Purposive determinism (Teleologism)

—Indeterminism

—in nature (“chance”)

—in man (“free will”)

4. Is there a place for value in nature?

—yes (Axiological Realism)

—no (Positivism; Axiological Nihilism)

—only insofar as it is man-made (Naturalism)

On this basis, a taxonomy of positions is developed by making an inventory of the main questions of the field, and then surveying the range of possible answers.

What differentiates this encyclopedist approach and renders it more bearable than the aprioristic approach of the Wolff-Kant tradition is its grounding in the interest problem-structure of metaphysics, which is relatively secure, rather than in the epistemology of metaphysical inquiry, which is inherently contestable.

7. ORDER BY ONTOLOGICAL PARADIGM: S. C. PEPPER’S ROOT METAPHORS

An interesting departure from the traditional lines of approach to the taxonomy of metaphysics is afforded by S. C. Pepper’s theory of “root metaphors”.[10] Pepper regards traditional metaphysics as based on a family of fundamental modals or analogies. He envisions basic alternatives according to the analogy-model for the metaphysical description of nature as

an (inert) thing, a machine, a process, or an organism. Accordingly, there are four root metaphors and four major modes of metaphysical doctrine:

1. "Formism" based on the metaphor-model of thing and thing-kind—of types, sorts, classes considered by likeness relations. Resemblance (similarly) as the organizing principle.

2. "Mechanism" based on the metaphor-model of a machine and its laws of operation. Behavioral pre-programming of operation as the organizing principle.

3. "Contextualism." Events and processes as the metaphor model. Temporal occurrence as the organizing principle.

4. "Organicism." Organisms and their functioning as the metaphor model. Integrative interrelation as the organizing principle.

Pepper's approach is interesting and suggestive, but not altogether satisfying. Its development is simply too fortuitous. The question of why these four and not others is not addressed by him—let alone cogently resolved. Pepper's theory represents an attempt at systematization that is not systematic enough. In theory, every discovery of a new type of thing (for example, a subatomic particle with quantum behavior) provides a new possible basis for a "root metaphor".

A somewhat more systematic implementation of Pepper's "root metaphor" approach might begin with an ontological classification of objects characterized by different modes of comportment—different types of action and reaction that things may exhibit:

Inert things and thing-kinds (mechanical action)

Organisms (biological action)

People (thought, intelligent agency)

Societies/Groups of people (social interaction)

Processes (activities performed by things, agencies, or people):

Process Philosophy

Artifacts/Products of the agency of organisms or people

—Physical: Machines

—Intellectual: Thoughts

And at this stage one can now project—in line with the "root metaphor" idea—a spectrum of metaphysical theories according to which item on the preceding list provides the explanatory analogue for comprehending the furnishings/process of nature. This would elaborate Pepper's four-fold root-metaphor basis into the more elaborate seven-sided array:

Inert things: MATERIALISM (e.g. Democritus)

Organisms: ORGANICISM (e.g. Aristotle)

People: PANPSYCHISM (e.g. Berkeley)

Societies: MONADISM (e.g. Leibniz)

Processes: PROCESS PHILOSOPHY (e.g. Whitehead)

Artifacts:

—Machines:

Teleological theism (The physical world as God's clockwork): DEISM (Descartes, Newton) or

A theological mechanism (The physical world as a "grown", self-developed machine): MECHANISM (e.g. Laplace)

—Thoughts: IDEALISM (e.g. Plato)

But the difficulty with the whole approach is now clear: namely the need for a classificatory basis for its "root metaphor" scheme. A metaphysical

commitment is thus presupposed. And this means that the entire root metaphor approach is ultimately a blind alley for rational taxonomy.

8. A REPRISE OF THE EROTETIC APPROACH

There is good reason to think that the most satisfactory approach to the issue of a rational taxonomy of metaphysical positions is to be found along the direction of the encyclopedic approach envisioned by Carus. Here we begin by inventorying "the fundamental questions of the discipline"—the issues whose consideration defines the constituting mandate of the field as the particular intellectual discipline it is (in contrast, say, to geology or economics)—questions such as:

(1) What is the definitional character of being or existence? What, in general, is it to be or exist?

(2) What is the descriptive nature of being in the abstract, of "being qua being"? How is existence-in-general to be described and understood?

(3) What is the classificatory taxonomy of being or existence? What kinds of existents are there?

(4) What is the descriptive mechanism for characterizing existence? What is concept-machinery approaches to the description and/or classification of existence, the "category scheme" for its discussion?

(5) What is the basic form of being? Is there one sort existent that gives rise to the rest?[11]

(6) How does that which is come to be known?

An inventory of the central problems of metaphysics would thus involve the description, classification, explanation, and evaluation of existence—together with the classification of the terms of reference and standards of procedure by whose means these several tasks are accomplished. In consequence, apart from the meta-metaphysical characterization of the discipline itself, four distinct major metaphysical projects are envisioned: descriptive

metaphysics, taxonomic metaphysics, evaluative metaphysics, categorical metaphysics. Unlike the root metaphor approach, this sort of taxonomy does pivot the issue on something that can itself only be the end product of metaphysical inquiry, but on something that has to be there from the very first—the domain-defining questions that from the very outset delineate the project of metaphysics as the particular project that it is.

With a question-inventory in hand, the classification of doctrinal position of the field hinges on surveying the general sort of answers that can be given to its various questions. For example, as regards question (1) above, one would enumerate theories that see existence to lie in:

—having a position in space/time (being an ostensively indicatable "this")

—having a position in time

—acting upon and causing effects among things having a position in space/time

—being a product of the activities of things having a position in space/time

—etc.

To be sure, once one adopts a particular position with respect to these questions—say atomism on the question of basic existents—then the problem of the nature of the atoms arises on one's metaphysical agenda, in a way that it would not do if one were an idealist and rejected physical atoms. But that doesn't matter from the angle of the taxonomy of positions. For clearly, the classificatory venture proceeds on a hypothetical basis: "If one is an atomist, then the question of the nature of the atoms must be confronted." (In classifying positions we need not adopt them.) Of course, on this approach there is no tidy, limited overall register of positions of the sort one would secure on a root metaphor approach. The taxonomy of positions becomes as diversified and complex as the range of questions that can arise in the field. Taxonomy becomes as untidy in philosophy as it has become in science.

In conclusion, it is of interest to note that one can also devise a meta-taxonomy to survey the range of taxonomic approaches to the classification of metaphysical positions. The result could stand somewhat as follows:

I. A priori classifications

A. Geared to the epistemology of metaphysical investigation. (Kant)

B. Geared to the range of models, metaphors or paradigms available for use in the projection of metaphysical world-views. (Pepper)

C. Geared to the problematic of the discipline—the range of questions that constitute its problem-mandate as an area of inquiry. (Carus, Encyclopedism)

II. A posteriori classifications

A. Geared to the successive developmental influences among the various historically developed positions. (Hegel)

B. Geared to the substantive correspondences and similarities among the various historically developed positions. (Tiedemann)

C. Geared to the psychological orientation of those who proposed (or espouse) the various historically developed positions. (Dilthey, James)

As this inventory suggests, the taxonomy of philosophical taxonomies cannot be completed. For the prospect of further development on the a posteriori side cannot be precluded on general principles of any kind. Philosophy demands conceptual innovations and there is no way to canalize this sort of novelty in advance of the fact.

NOTES

1 His theory of systems is set out by Lambert in various essays (including the brief *Fragment einer Systematologie* [with parts dated 1767 and 1771], *Theorie des Systems* [1782] and *Von den Lücken unserer Erkenntnis* [c. 1785]. Lambert's philosophical writings were issued by J. Bernoulli (ed.), Johann Henrich Lambert: *Logische und Philosophische Abhandlungen*, two vols. (Berlin, 1782 and 1787; reprinted Hildesheim, 1967, ed. by H. W. Arndt).

NOTES

2 See in particular Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), esp. Book II, Pt. 3 "The Architectonic of Pure Reason."

3 On the general background see the author's *Cognitive Systematization* (Oxford, 1979).

4 Compare Lucien Braun, *L'Historie de l'historie de la philosophie* (Paris, 1973), p. 233.

5 Especially in his six volume history of the *Spirit of Speculative Philosophy* (*Geist der speculativen Philosophie* [Marburg, 1791-1797]). On Tiedemann see Lucien Braun, op. cit., pp. 189 ff.

6 "die mancherley Philosophie-Systeme auf ihre alleresten in der Natur des menschlichen Geistes liegenden Quellen zurückzuführen" (*Geist*, Vol. IV, p. xvii).

7 Lucien Braun, op.cit., pp. 252 ff.

8 See his 1906 essay on "The Present Dilemma in Philosophy," published in *Pragmatism* (New York and London, 1907), pp. 3-40.

9 Here cited from the second edition, Berlin 1922, pp. 396-99 (see esp. p. 396).

10 Stephen C. Pepper, *World Hypotheses* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1942).

11 This particular list is taken from the *Disputationes Metaphysicae* (1597) of Francisco Suarez.

Chapter 7

THE ARGUMENTATION
What Substantiates the Fundamentals?

1. FIRST PRINCIPLES

Philosophy's concern is not with bare opinions but with reasoned judgments. And reasoning requires premisses: in rational inquiry as in production we confront the reality that *ex nihilo nihil*. So where are those materials for philosophical reflection to come from? How are the fundamental principles of philosophical reasoning to be secured?

Philosophy deals with fundamentals, with "first principles" that are able to accommodate experience in smooth attunement to the concrete interactions through which the world's realities make their impact upon us. But all too clearly, the first principles from which our inquirers set out cannot be validated with reference to further considerations that are somehow more basic. (Essentially this is so by hypothesis, since if they could be established in this way, those principles would not be "first" or basic.) Accordingly, since first principles cannot be justified in terms of other, yet more fundamental premisses, they will—if justified at all—have to be justified in terms of their consequences. Their validation requires a systemic approach. It must thus be shown that if the principle is rejected then either (1) certain eminently desirable results will be lost, or (2) certain highly negative results will ensue. The upshot is that such principles can only be validated in terms of the unacceptable implications of their abandonment. In sum, first principles are to be judged by how smoothly they fit into the explanatory rationale of our experience with a view in particular to the question of how efficient an instrumentality they provide for the overall explanation and systematization of that experience. The crux here is that the basic first principles of philosophical deliberation must not only meet the conditions of theoretical systematicity but must do so with reference to experience.

The dialectical process at issue may be clarified in a schematic manner as follows. One begins with the presumptive "trial assumption" or "provisional hypothesis" of a certain cognitive mechanism—an instrumentality (process, method) for issue-resolution. One then proceeds to employ this

instrumentality so as to determine a body of putative knowledge—an overall system. Thereupon, one deploys this knowledge to provide a rational accommodation for our "experience"—an information at large. Then, one *revises* the initial "trial assumption" (provisional hypotheses) with a view to the successes and failures of these applications. And then the process starts all over again at the first step. What is at issue throughout is not just a merely *retrospective revalidation* in the theoretical order of justification, but an actual *revision or improvement* in the dialectical order of development, a cognitive upgrading of suppositions initially adopted on a tentative basis.

Descartes says that only physical things and intelligent beings exist. But what then of animals? Plato maintains that mathematical objects like shapes and numbers exist in a separate realm altogether apart from the material world. But how then can we embodied humans know them? Once a substantive philosophical thesis is formulated, further questions about its meaning, implications, bearing, and purport will always arise. As it stands, in its actual and overt formulation, the thesis is not complete, not quite correct, not altogether adequate to what needs to be said on the subject. Under the pressure of an ongoing readjustment to an ever-widening context of considerations, it admits of various alternative interpretations, constructions, elaborations; it presents further issues that must be resolved, requiring explanation, exposition, qualification. Taken just as it stands, without further elaboration, the exposition is not satisfactory: it leaves loose ends and admits of undermining objections.

In examining our first principles—and thus the philosophical theses that hinge upon them—we accordingly embark on a cyclic (and thus in theory nonterminating) process of elaboration and reformulation. Such a dialectic of contention and elaborative explanation engenders an ever more fine-ground detail the inner commitments and involvements of the initial position that was the starting point of our endeavor to answer the philosophical question at issue. With any substantive philosophical issue, the process of problem-solving and issue resolution can thus carried on at ever more elaborate levels of sophistication.

The ongoing elaboration of a philosophical position constitutes a process of expository development that increasingly brings its various aspects into clearer and sharper focus. The continuing development of conceptual machinery provides a process of *ideational* magnification analogous to the process of perceptual magnification that accompanies the ongoing development of the physical machinery of microscopy. And there is no reason of

principle why this continual sophistication need ever cease; it can go on as long as our patience and energy and interest hold out. When we stop, it is because our curiosity is assigned to the point when we are willing to rest content, and not because the project as such is completed.

It emerges on this perspective that the first principles that are basic to philosophical understanding are "first" (and ultimate questions "ultimate") only in the first instance or in the first analysis and not in the final instance and the final analysis. Their firstness represents but a single "moment" in the larger picture of the dialectic of legitimation. They do not mark the dead-end of a *ne plus ultra* that admits no further elaboration and substantiation. The question "Why these principles rather than something else?" is certainly *not* illegitimate here. It is something we can not only ask but also answer, even if only provisionally and imperfectly, in terms of the complex dialectic afforded by the cyclic structure of legitimation as sketched above.

Reflection on this process makes it clear that if this indeed is how the first principles of inquiry in question-resolution are legitimated, then the epistemic status of such principles is defeasible in the light of "the course of experience" and—irrespective of their *content*—their *status* becomes *a posteriori* and contingent. This circumstance is one whose importance cannot be overemphasized. It means that no particular formulation of a philosophical position—no explicitly stated substantive resolution to a philosophical problem—can be altogether definitive as it actually stands, without further explanation, qualification, and explanatory exposition. Further questions will always arise that need to be addressed in the larger scheme of things.

Philosophy's determinative first principles and their correlative substantive doctrinal contentions are thus seen as defeasible and defensible: they can and need to be legitimated—a process that proceeds in the light of empirical considerations. Forming, as they do, an integral component of the cognitive methods that have evolved over the course of time, it can be said of them—as of other strictly methodological instrumentalities—that "*die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht*", or, loosely translated, "The proof of the pudding is in the eating." (Recall too Hegel's penetrating dictum that metaphysics must follow experience and not precede it.)

These observations go no further than to say that circumstances *could* arise in which even those very fundamental first principles that define for us the very idea of a philosophical category might have to be given up. But conceding the *possibility* at issue here is not—of course—to grant its likelihood—let alone its actuality. Once entrenched, the principles at issue are

so integral a component of *our* rationality that we ourselves cannot even conceive of *any* rationality that dispenses with them: we can readily conceive *that* they might have to be abandoned, but can scarcely conceive *how*. And so, granting the in-principle defeasibility of these principles does nothing to undermine their indispensability for us now, in the present state of the art in our inquiries. In philosophizing as in travel, we have no alternative to starting out from where it is that we in fact are.

2. A PLATONIC RETROSPECT

A brief historical retrospect is in order. For the basic idea that is at work in the preceding account goes back to the very dawn of speculative thought about the nature of explanation—to Plato's discussion in the *Republic* (at Book VII, 510 B-C).

> In studying geometric matters, the mind is compelled to employ assumptions, and, because it cannot rise above these, does not travel upwards to a first principle; and moreover the mind here uses diagrams as images of those actual things. However, this mathematical sector contrasts with the [philosophical] sector of the intelligible world which unaided reasoning apprehends by the power of dialectic. this treats its assumptions, not as first principles, but as *hypotheses* in the literal sense, things "laid down" like a flight of steps up which it may mount all the way to something that is not hypothetical, the first principle of all. Then, having grasped this, the mind may turn back and, holding on to the consequences which depend upon it, descend at last to a conclusion, never making use of any sensible object, but only of Forms, moving through Forms from one to another, and ending with Forms. [And so we must] distinguished the field of intelligible reality studied by dialectic as having a greater certainty and truth than the subject-matter of the 'arts,' as they are called, which treat their assumptions as first principles. The students of these arts are, it is true, compelled to exercise thought in contemplating objects which the senses cannot perceive; but because they start from assumptions without going back to a first principle, you do not regard them an gaining true understanding about those objects, although the objects themselves, when connected with a first principles, are intelligible.

As such deliberations indicate, Plato too found the idea of unexplained explainers unpalatable. His complaint regarding Euclidean style geometry, for example, is just exactly this—that it proceeds from first principles that are laid down as arbitrary stipulations ("absolute hypotheses") and not themselves fitted out with an explanatory rationale. By contrast, the great

merit of philosophy—as he saw it—is that it treats its first principles not as absolute but as provisional hypotheses and that it proceeds not *deductively* but *dialectically*, looking down along the chain of consequences in order to substantiate the principle from which they derived their credibility.

Accordingly, Plato's position stressed the idea that for thoroughgoing rationality one must take philosophy's deeper dialectical approach of justifying one's beliefs cyclically, so to speak, by looking first upwards to first principles which themselves are then justified downwards with reference to these consequences and ramifications. As Plato thus saw it, the standard process of mathematical justification of terms of absolute hypotheses that themselves remain unjustified—however customary in geometry or arithmetic—is not ultimately satisfactory from a rational point of view because it leaves off at the point where a different, dialectical methodology is called for.

And essentially this same line of reasoning is at issue in the two-tier conception of explanation to which—if the present account is anything like correct—we are driven in the course of trying to make workable sense of the conception of an ultimate theory in physical explanation. For the only really satisfactory validation of any purportedly ultimate commitment is one that invokes the over-all performance of that commitment within the entire system with reference within which its ultimacy obtains. Only the harmonization of this fact within the larger structure of pre-systematic experience as it becomes clarified and sharpened through efforts of systemic integration and coordination can bring to light what sorts of "first principles" are viable for the purposes of philosophizing.

The process of systematization that validates those seemingly axiomatic starting points also envisions something ultimate. But what is ultimate here does not lie in the range of axioms, theses, or propositions, but rather is something methodological—the "dialectal" process, as it were, by which such proported starting points become validated through cyclic and retrospective considerations. Paradoxical though it may seem, the determination of what is basic in philosophy does not come at the start of an inquiry but at its end.

3. THE RHETORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The term *rhetoric* will here be used in a rather special sense. It will *not* be used to mean the theory or practice of language-deploying exposition in general. Instead, it will function as a contrast term to *argumentation*—

which in its turn is here understood as the project of seeking to elicit the acceptance of certain contentions by means of substantiating reasons. The work of rhetoric, by contrast, here is construed as one of inducing agreement by representing certain contentions in a favorable light, seeking to elicit their acceptance by one's interlocutors through noting their *intrinsically* appealing features, rather than through substantiating them on the basis of their relationship to *other* propositions that are intended to provide probative or evidential grounds for them. Thus, while argumentation deploys the resources of inferential reasoning (be it inductive or deductive) to substantiate some claims on the basis of others, rhetoric is seen as a matter of *noninferential* substantiative appeal. Accordingly, when one seeks to *motivate* the acceptance of claims by drawing attention to such positive attributes as these claims may exhibit on their own by placing them in a favorable light in the sight of one's interlocutors, one is proceeding rhetorically. Rhetoric, in sum, involves the endeavor to induce acceptance of propositions through bringing to notice some feature or other of the condition of the contention at issue that has a substantial impetus.

This means that certain dialectical moves are available to the rhetorician that are unavailable to the reasoner. The reasoner must relate the *assertoric content* of the proposition to that of those other, substantiating propositions. The rhetorician, by contrast, has the option of abstracting from a claim's specific content altogether, addressing himself to its source or its nature rather than to its assertoric substance. Thus the fact that a proposition issues from a *reliable* source can bring grist to the rhetorician's mill, although it clearly involves no reference to the content of the proposition at issue, and a fortiori no inference to this content from the asserted content of otherwise available information.

This use of the term *rhetoric* may perhaps seem somewhat idiosyncratic but it nevertheless has certain significant merits.

If dictionaries can be believed, general usage understands rhetoric as something like the "art of speaking or writing persuasively". But this seems altogether too wide since overtly demonstrative discourse can also serve the interests of persuasion. Aristotle, on the other hand, construed rhetoric as *imperfect demonstration,* construing it as specifically enthymematic reasoning. But this seems too narrow. Rhetoric as we generally understand it is clearly something very different from incomplete demonstration. The best compromise seems to consist in viewing rhetoric as a matter of nondemonstrative or—more generally—noninferential persuasion. This enables us at once to understand the enterprise as a persuasive endeavor

and to contrast it with specifically demonstrative argumentation in the inductive and deductive modes. This at any rate will be the line we take in these present deliberations.

Interestingly enough, this perspective on the matter leads to the rather startling conclusion that reasoned argumentation is ultimately dependent on rhetoric. Let us consider how this comes about.

It is a fundamental fact of rational—as also of practical—life that *ex nihilo nihil*: in human affairs, intellectual and practical alike, you cannot make something from nothing. Be it in written form or in verbal discourse, to secure something by rational argumentation we must ultimately proceed from conceded premisses. And here inferential rationality is of no further avail, given its indispensable recourse to premisses.

After all, abstract rationality does not tell us what we must unconditionally accept, but only what we must or must not accept if we accept certain other things. Here the role of conditionalization becomes crucial. But to engage the wheels of inferential reason we need inputs—unconditional commitments that can turn our *if-thens* into *sinces*. And while this input can be, and generally is itself discursively grounded—that is, obtained by rational inference from elsewhere—it cannot be so "all the way down". All these are matters that Aristotle already saw as clearly as anyone, recognizing that reasons must proceed from prior concessions in attaining their purposes. This state of affairs at once leads to the question of how such requisite concessions are to be obtained.

In any dialectical situation we can *reason* only from what is available—and this ultimately means proceeding from claims that have been conceded. The regress of rationally justified conclusions will and must always come to a stop at some point in unreasoned premisses. Reason's inferential *takens* must end up in conceded and uninferred *givens*. And here rhetoric comes to play an important and indispensable role, for one of its salient tasks is to secure such givens.

It is clear that in certain contexts of discussion various claims may be taken for granted. They come free of charge, so to speak, as commonplaces of the domain—presumptive truths that hold by the topically prevailing conventions. Definitions and traditionary usages afford one example, and the realm of familiar fact and accepted knowledge yet another. But this sort of thing does not take us very far. The range of the noninferential input into our inferential argumentation must clearly be expanded beyond the sphere of local commonplaces.

Like most workmen, the rational dialectician needs materials with which to fashion products, and in this case it is the rhetorician who can provide the requisite input. The key work of rhetoric in rational dialectic is accordingly to elicit from our interlocutors a variety of concessions on whose basis the work of actual inference can come into operation. At this point we must make the transit from reason to judgment and from demonstration to motivation. That is, we must proceed by way of reminders and appeals that amplify the minimal range of locally unproblematic givens.

Here, as everywhere, the issue of normative propriety crops up. Beyond concerning oneself with what people *do* accept (a strictly factual issue), one can turn to the matter what they *should* accept (a distinctly normative one). Conscientious rhetoricians will accordingly endeavor to awaken their interlocutors to a proper sense of what they should accept.

And so one important point must be stressed. There is nothing to say that rhetoric, as here understood, must focus on established beliefs and preexisting opinions rather than play an active role in the formulation and shaping of beliefs and opinions. But of course the epistemically *conscientious* rhetoricians will make appeal to cognitively based—that is, *experientially* based—considerations rather than appeal to emotions or prejudices.

The lesson that emerges from these deliberation is that the probative structure of the situation is such that rational dialectic cannot dispense with rhetoric. In the overall setting of rational argumentation, it is not the *presence* but the *extent* of a recourse to rhetoric that is at issue: the only question—the pivotal issue, so to speak—is not *whether* but *how much*.

This being the situation in probative dialectics in general, I propose now to consider the lay of the land specifically in my own field of professional concern, namely, philosophy. The issue that preoccupies the rest of this discussion is that of philosophical methodology resolving about the question: How can (and should) philosophers go about making out a convincing case for the positions they would induce their readers to accept?

4. THE SITUATION OF PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy cannot provide a cogent explanation for *everything*, rationalizing all of its claims “all the way down”. Here, as elsewhere the process of explanation and rationalization must—to all appearances—sooner or later come to a halt in the acceptance of at least locally unexplained explainers. Given that explanation is—as Aristotle already stressed—a process that proceeds linearly, in the manner of logical derivation, by explaining *A* in

terms of *B*, which is in its turn explained in terms of *C*, and this in turn referred to *D*, then of course we must accept some inexplicable ultimate—unless we are to descend into an infinite regress, a process that is not particularly satisfying, and especially not so in philosophy. At some point, then, we must turn from the discursive to the rhetorical mode. There are two very different modes of philosophical proceeding—the *evocative* and the *discursive*.

Discursive philosophy pivots on inferential expressions such as *because*, *since*, *therefore*, *has the consequence that*, *and so cannot*, *must accordingly*, and the like. Evocative philosophizing, by contrast, bristles with adjectives of approbation or derogation—*evident*, *sensible*, *untenable*, *absurd*, *inappropriate*, *unscientific*, and comparable adverbs such as *evidently*, *obviously*, *foolishly*, *ill advisedly*, and the like. To be sure, this rhetorical process is also a venture in justificatory systematization—just like inferential reasoning—but it is one of a rather different kind. Discursive philosophizing relies primarily on inference and argumentation to substantiate its claims; evocative philosophizing relies primarily on the rhetoric of persuasion. The one seeks to secure the reader's (or auditor's) assent by inferential reasoning, the other by an appeal to values and appraisals—and above all by an appeal to fit and consonance within the overall scheme of things.

Consider as a paradigm of evocative philosophizing the following passage from Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* (with characterizations of approbation/derogation italicized):

> It is in the sphere of contracts and legal obligations that the moral universe of guilt, conscience, and duty—*sacred duty*!— took its inception. Those beginnings were *liberally sprinkled with blood*, as are the beginnings of *everything great on earth*. (And may we not say that ethics has never lost its *reek of blood* and torture—not even in Kant, whose categorical imperative *smacks of cruelty*?) It was then that the *sinister knitting together* of the two ideas guilt and pain first occurred, which by now have become quite inextricable. Let us ask once more: in what sense could pain constitute repayment of a debt? In the sense that to make someone suffer was *a supreme pleasure*. To behold suffering gives pleasure, but to cause another to suffer affords an *even greater pleasure*. This *severe statement* expresses an old, powerful, *human, all too human sentiment*—though the monkeys too might endorse it, for it is reported that they heralded and preluded man in the devising of *bizarre cruelties*. There is no feast without cruelty, as man's entire history attests. Punishment, too, has its *festive features*.[1]

Note now this highly evocative passage is replete with devices of evaluative (i.e., positive/negative) characterizations. But observe, too, the total absence of inferential expressions. We are, clearly, *invited* to draw certain unstated conclusions on an essentially evaluative basis. But the inference that man is *by nature* given to cruelty, and therefore cruelty—being a natural and innate tendency of ours—is not something bad, something deserving condemnation is left wholly implicit as an exercise for the reader. This unasserted conclusion at which the discussion aims is hinted at but never stated, implied but never maintained. In consequence, reason can gain no fulcrum for pressing the plausible objection: But why should something natural thereby automatically be deemed good; why should the primitiveness of a sentiment or mode of behavior safeguard it against a negative evaluation? By leaving the reader to his own conclusion-drawing devices, Nietzche relieves himself of the labor of argumentation and the annoyance of objection. Not troubling to formulate his position explicitly, he feels no need to give it *support*; he is quite content to *insinuate* it. Here, as elsewhere, he is a master practitioner of evocative philosophizing.

By contrast to the preceding Nietzche passage, consider the following ideologically kindred passage from Hume's *Treatise* (with evaluative terms italicized and inferential terms capitalized):

> Now, SINCE the distinguishing impressions by which moral good or evil is known are nothing but particular pains or pleasures, IT FOLLOWS that in all inquiries concerning these moral distinctions IT WILL BE SUFFICIENT TO SHOW the principles which make us feel a satisfaction or uneasiness from the survey of any character, IN ORDER TO SATISFY US WHY the character is *laudable* or *blamable*. An action, or sentiment, or character, is *virtuous* or *vicious*; WHY? BECAUSE its view causes a pleasure or uneasiness of a particular kind. In giving a reason, THEREFORE, for the pleasure or uneasiness, we sufficiently explain the vice or virtue. To have the sense of virtue is nothing but to feel a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character. The very feeling constitutes our praise or admiration. We go no further; nor do we inquire into the cause of the satisfaction. WE DO NOT INFER a character to be *virtuous* BECAUSE it pleases; but in feeling that it pleases after such a particular manner we in effect feel that it is *virtuous*. The case is the same as in our judgments concerning all kinds of beauty, and tastes, and sensations. Our approbation is IMPLIED in the immediate pleasure they convey to us.[2]

Observe how this passage bristles with the terminology of ratiocination. What we have all too clearly here is not the stylistic modality of insinuation and evocation but that of argumentation and demonstration.

To be sure, the doctrinal nature and even the ideology of the two passages are not all that different. With Nietzche, cruelty is something of a virtue—but only because people are held to be generally pleased by engaging in its practice. With Hume, it is something of a vice—but only because people are generally displeased by witnessing it. The positions differ but their ideological kinship is clear; both writers agree that cruelty is not something that is inherently bad as such—for them the pro or con-reaction by people is all-determinative.

Be this as it may, it is strikingly clear that these kindred positions are advanced in very different ways. In the Nietzsche passage, the "argumentation ratio" of inferential to evaluative expressions is 0 to 12, in the Hume passage it is 9 to 6. Hume, in effect, seeks to *reason* his readers into agreement by presenting a putative a deduction from plain facts; Nietzche seeks to *coax* them into it by an appeal to conceded suppositions and prejudgments.

These different approaches reflect larger issues. Reflection on the contrast between the discursive and the rhetorical modes of philosophical exposition points to a recognition that these two styles are congenial to rather different objectives.

The inferential, argumentative mode of philosophical exposition is by nature geared to enlisting the reader's assent to certain theses or theories by way of reasoning. It is thus most efficient for securing a reader's assent to certain claims on the basis of the evidential or predictive relations among one's *beliefs*. It is coordinated to a view of philosophy that sees the discipline in *information-oriented* terms, as preoccupied with the answering of certain questions: the solution of certain cognitive problems.

By contrast, the rhetorical, evocative mode of philosophical exposition is by nature geared to securing acceptance with respect to *evaluations*. It is preoccupied with forming—or reforming—our sensibilities with respect to the *value* and, above all, with shaping or influencing one's priorities and evaluations. It is bound up with a view of philosophy that sees the discipline in *axiological* terms. It does not proceed by reasoning from prior philosophical givens, but rather exerts its impetus *directly* on the cognitive values and sympathies that we have fixed on the basis of our experience of the world's ways.[3] Only indirectly—that is, only insofar as our beliefs and

opinions are shaped by and reflective of our values—does the rhetorical mode of procedure impact on beliefs.

As these considerations indicate, the rhetorical method comes into its own by enabling an exposition to make an appeal to—and if need be influence and modify—the recipient's preestablished outlook in order to induce a suitable adjustment of evaluations. In thus appealing to an interlocutor's evaluative sensibilities, the rhetorician must enlist the persuasive impetus of this person's body of experiences—vicarious experiences included. Here providing information can help—but only by way of influencing the sensibility, the reader's established way of looking at things and appraising them. There are, of course, many ways to pursue this project. A collection of suitably constituted illustrations and examples, a survey of selected historical episodes that serve as instructive case studies (history teaching by examples), or a vividly articulated fiction can all orient a reader's evaluative sentiments in a chosen direction—as Voltaire's *Candide* or the philosophical methodology of Ludwig Wittgenstein amply illustrate. And, of course, pure invective can also prove rhetorically effective if sufficiently clever in its articulation. What matters is that agreement is elicited through a contention's being rendered plausible and acceptable by its consonance with duly highlighted aspects of our experience—so that the course of our experience as a preestablished given itself becomes the determinative factor.

It is somewhat surprising that there should be so little connection in philosophy between one's ideological orientation and one's expository style. Thinkers of a distinctly scientistic orientation often resort to the tempting appeal of the rhetorical mode (as the Spinoza of the *Ethics* breaks the chains of his *more geometrico* exposition and cuts loose in the scholia). And philosophers who adopt highly normative/evaluative positions sometimes advocate them by very argumentative means that give the impression of close reasoning (Francis Herbert Bradley for example). In philosophy, doctrinal tendency and expository mode are less closely conjoined than one might expect.

Nonetheless, markedly distinct views of the mission of the enterprise are at issue with the discursive and evocative approaches to philosophizing, and any debate over the respective merits of the two modes of philosophical exposition is by this very fact rendered inseparable from a dispute about the nature of philosophy. The quarrel is ultimately a contest of ownership: to whom does the discipline of philosophy properly belong, to

the argumentative demonstrators or to the evocative rhetoricians? Whose approach is to be paramount?

This turf war over the ownership of philosophy has been going on since the very inception of the subject. Among the pre-Socratics, the Milesians founded a nature philosophy addressed primarily at issues we should nowadays classify as scientific in a more of less demonstrative manner, while such thinkers as Xenophanes, Heraclitus, and Pythagoras took an evocative—evaluative and distinctly literary—approach to philosophy, illustrated by the following Pythagorean dictum:

> Life is like a festival; just as some come to the festival to compete, some to ply their trade, but the best people come as spectators, so in life slavish men go hunting for fame or gain, the philosophers for the truth.[4]

In nineteenth-century Germany philosophy, Hegel and his rationalizing school typified the scientific/discursive approach, while the post-moderns who were their opponents—Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche—all exemplify the axiological/rhetorical approach. In the twentieth century, the scientistic movement represented by logical positivism vociferously insisted on using the methodology of demonstration, while their antirationalistic opponents among the existentialists resorted extensively to evocative literary devices to promulgate their views—to such an extent that their demonstration-minded opponents sought to exile their work from philosophy into literature, journalism, or some such less "serious" mode of intellectual endeavor.

In this connection, we see as clearly as anywhere the tendency among philosophers toward defining the entire subject in such a way that their own sort of work is central to the enterprise and that their own favored methodology becomes definitive for the way in which work in the field should properly be done. The absence of that urbanity that enables one to see other people's ways of doing things as appropriate and (in *their* circumstances) entirely acceptable is thus perhaps the most widespread and characteristic failing of practicing philosophers. But the fact remains that while individual *philosophers* generally have no alternative but to choose one particular mode of philosophizing as focus of their allegiance, *philosophy* as such has to accommodate both of these discordant emphases. Philosophy as such is broader than any one philosopher's philosophy.

Be this as it may, the irony of the situation is that philosophers simply cannot dispense—once and for all and totally—with the methodology they affect to reject and despise. Even the most demonstration-minded philoso-

pher cannot avoid entanglement in rhetorical devices, for even the most rationalistic of thinkers cannot argue demonstratively for everything, all the way down, so to speak. At some point a philosopher must invite assent through an appeal to sympathetic acquiescence based on experience as such. On the other hand, even the most value-ideological philosopher cannot altogether avert all argumentation insofar as his work is to be done thoroughly and well. A reliance on suitable standards of assessment is inescapably present in those proffered evaluations, and this issue of appropriateness cannot be addressed satisfactorily without some recourse to reasons.

It cannot be overemphasized that the availability of means for appraisal and evaluation of contentions is a fundamental precondition of rational controversy. Without the existence of objective standards of adequacy, rational controversy is inherently impossible. Argumentation is pointful as a rational process only if the extent to which a good case has been made out can be assessed in retrospect on a common, shared basis of judgment. Without the guidance of an assessment mechanism for evaluating relevancy and cogency—one whose appropriateness to the discussion at hand is, if not preestablished, at any rate capable of being rationally validated—the whole enterprise of deliberation and discussion becomes futile.

The upshot of these considerations, then, is that while rhetoric without reason in indeed unphilosophical, nevertheless in philosophy reasoning itself becomes impracticable without some rhetorically provided manifold of input materials.

The rhetorical dimension of rationale-provision is crucial in philosophy because in this field we do—or should—aim at substantiating our conclusion through an appeal to experience. And it is our experience of life in this world which must, in the final analysis, provide the materials for the substantiation of our philosophy.

Ironically, then, the two modes of philosophy are locked into an uneasy but indissoluble union. While neither the discursive (inferential) nor the rhetorical (evocative) school can feel altogether comfortable about using the methodology favored by its rival, it lies in the rational structure of the situation that neither side can manage altogether to free itself from entanglement with the opposition. The practice of philosophy is ultimately a matter of striving for a smooth systemic closure between the cognitive projections of reason and the value-formative data of experience—a harmonization in which these two competing modes of philosophizing have to come into a mutually supportive overall harmonization.[5]

NOTES

1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, essay 2, sec. 6.

2 David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, bk. 3, pt. 1, sec. 2.

3 Compare Henry W. Johnstone, *Philosophy and Argument* (State College, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1959)

4 G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), frag. 278.

5 This chapter was initially presented as a paper at the conference on "Argumentation and Rhetoric" held under the auspices of the Ontario Society for the Study of Argumentation at Brock University in May 1997. For a more extensive treatment of the relevant issues see the author's *Philosophical Reasoning: A Study in the Methodology of Philosophizing* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) and *Communicative Pragmatism and Other Philosophical Essays on Language* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998).

Chapter 8

THE TERMINOLOGY
The Problem of Defining One's Terms

1. FACT-LADEN CONCEPTS

One writer has argues on behalf of scepticism that we cannot be certain of the meaning of the words in which we conduct our communicative business on thought and discourse. Even with the Cartesian "I think, so I exist"—so he asks—how can one be categorically certain that that I refers to myself and that *exist* means "to have being" rather than say—'to endure over time in the face of obstacles."[1] But this argumentation is a decidedly dangerous sword that cuts two ways. For if I refrain from a pre-commitment to the idea that the words I employ mean what they standardly do—that in speaking or thinking of mice I mean those little animals that squeak rather than those big ones that roar—then I just cannot coherently conduct the business of thinking in language. In being sceptical about the meaning of the very words I employ in my musings and discourse I plunge into regions altogether disconnected from coherent thought. The sceptic who inclines to this sort of view cuts off the limb on which he sits, unable to achieve a meaningful articulation of his own position—the very one he meant to consider. That in using the language we mean what we say is an indispensable presumption not just for truth but for coherent meaningfulness as such. And the moment that hermeneutical scepticism exerts its corrosive influence upon language it self-destructs as a defensible and indeed even as a coherently statable position.

Moreover, philosophers cannot just make up the meaning of words as they go along. By and large the meaning of the terminology that one employs in philosophical deliberation is not a constant by a given. Words are not our slaves—we cannot force them to do our will. And so we have to come to terms within certain crucial realities:

1. Philosophers cannot (re-)define their terms: They are tied to the terms of reference of ordinary language.

2. Yet these terms do not really meet their needs.

3. But they do keep our feet on the ground. Tied to the world's operative realities.

The problems of philosophy—those big questions about life, the world, and the human condition—are rooted in the questions that we pose in the language of our everyday experience and discourse. And if they are to be answered satisfactorily, they must, in the end, be answered in these ordinary terms. But ordinary language—our familiar instrument of everyday communication—is designed for practical purposes. It is a medium for the transmission of opinion and sentiment about the workaday world of our everyday experience developed across generations thanks to the necessity and desirability of communicating with one another about the world we live in. And it thus embodies the assumptions and presuppositions built into our commonplace view of things reflective of the common course of our experience.

The conceptions we generally employ in everyday life inhere in a language that is designed with a view to its application to reality. Their very reason for being is to enable us to categorize, describe, and explain what goes on in the world about us. They are predicated on beliefs and assumptions geared to reality as we experience and interpret it, enabling us to orient ourselves cognitively in our world. If this concept-machinery were not adjusted to the real—if it were not fitted to our experience of the world about us—it would be much useless baggage which, for that reason, would have been abandoned long ago even if, *per impossibile*, it had evolved in the first place. The linguistic mechanisms of ordinary discourse thus have to reflect the general course of our shared experiences because they would not exist as such if they did not do so. The link of our language to our experience is a precondition of its very being.

The familiar and prominent concepts we find enshrined in the language are literally *mundane* in that they reflect our beliefs as to how matters stand and how things work. And, in particular, they are bound to reflect the normal, ordinary course of things in which various theoretically separable factors actually go together. It is a truism that life consists primarily of the ordinary and commonplace. And the obvious corollary is that the conceptual instruments we devise for handling our experiences—which are initiated, developed, and transmitted precisely because they fit the requirements set by our communicative needs—are, in consequence, geared to the ordinary, commonplace, and normal.

This state of affairs endows our concept with a certain imprecision that always leaves room for conflict and incompatibility. In consequence of this, the conception of non-rigidly standardistic generalizations provides a powerful tool for philosophical problem solving. For philosophy arises not so much from wonder as from puzzlement. Many—if not most—philosophical problems root in aporetic situations where we face a hard choice among individually plausible but collectively inconsistent contentions.[2] Consider, for example, the following aporetic cluster of individually plausible but collectively incompatible theses:

- Promise breaking is morally wrong: promise breakings are always moral transgressions.

- It is never morally wrong to do what we cannot possibly help doing: doing something one cannot help is never a case of moral transgression.

- In some circumstances one cannot help breaking a promise (for example: when circumstances beyond one's control preclude one from honoring it).

It is clear on purely logical grounds that these three plausible-seeming theses are collectively incompatible—one or another of them must be rejected. And, considering that the third thesis is simply a fact of life, it results that, to all appearances, considerations of mere logical consistency constrain us to abandon one of those two initial contentions. But of course if one is willing to give those initial two generalizations a standardistic (rather than rigidly universal) reading, the incompatibility at issue at once vanishes. By softening these generalizations we preserve their tenability. Here, as often, the edge of conflict can be blunted by a standardistic construction of our generalizations, enabling us to retain what we wish to maintain substantially intact in the face of collective inconsistencies. And there is good reason of general principles why philosophical generalizations should be softened in this sort of way.

Attuned in the first instance to the requirements of practical purpose and the needs of efficient communication in real-life conditions, our concepts are geared to factual presuppositions—and, above all, to factual assumptions as to how things normally and ordinarily run in the world. Not that philosophy as such is a standardly empirical inquiry. Its deliberations are

basically conceptual and the empirical aspect comes in through the back door, as it were. The salient point is that the concepts it addresses operate in such a way as to incorporate a view of the empirical facts. One cannot satisfactorily elaborate their conceptual relationships without taking account of the empirical facts in which they are predicated. With the fact-oriented concepts of philosophical relevancy, semantical and factual considerations become intertwined: pure analysis can at best sort them out—it can bring to light the factual aspect of the concept, but it can in no way mitigate or remove this empirical aspect of reference to a factual background of experience. Where our concepts have factual presuppositions, any prospect of a neat dichotomy of "empirical" vs. "conceptual" goes by the board. At such points, the two issues become fused into a seamless whole. And philosophizing itself then becomes a (partially) empirical enterprise—notwithstanding its basic nature as "conceptology".[3]

2. PHILOSOPHY IS GEARED TO THE CONCEPTIONAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE ORDINARY COURSE OF LIFE

In the course of their explanatory efforts philosophers invoke generalizations. Either explicitly or by way of interpretative attribution they deploy theses like:

- All factual knowledge originates in the senses: *nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu*.

- All duties are rooted in rules: Whenever *X* has an obligation to do *A*, this is so in virtue of an appropriate general rule *R* stipulating that in *X*'s circumstances *A* is the obligatory thing to do.

- All existence is substance-connected: whatever exists is either a substance (a *thing* of some sort) or else a property or feature of things.

Generalizations of this sort constitute the heart and core of philosophical doctrines as we generally have them. But need they—nay, *should* they—be taken as strictly universal contentions? Or might it make better sense to construe them as stating not how things *must always* be rather than as maintaining how things *do normally* stand?

The motivating rationale for such a change of approach to philosophical generalizations lies deep in the nature of the concerns of this discipline.

The complex spiders' webs spun in philosophical theorizing are always attached to "the real world" of everyday life and its scientific refinements. Even a superficial look at the various subdivisions or branches of philosophy shows that they are virtually always rooted in matters of prephilosophical, everyday life concern. The materials of "human experience", in all the manifold senses of this conception, constitute the *raison d'être* of our philosophizing. The reflexive, second-order discipline of metaphilosophy aside, the issues of philosophy revolve about extraphilosophical concerns. Preeminently, philosophical questions arise in terms of the concepts of common life. The central concepts of philosophy ("mind", "matter", "causality", "nature", "reality", "truth", "knowledge", "agency", "personhood", "good", "right", "justice", etc.) are importations from the thought-world of everyday life where they serve us in the cognitive manipulation of everyday experience. When philosophers deal with *truth*, or *beauty*, or *goodness*, or *justice*, they are concerned with these ideas as they function in our everyday discussions and deliberations, they are certainly *not* proposing to address technical conceptions that are disjoint or distinct from the ways in which we ordinarily deliberate and talk about the issues. To be sure, they may be seeking a "rational reconstruction" of everyday usage in the manner of Carnap.[4] But here too the nature of the usage one is attempting to reconstruct remains the focal point. Philosophy—after all—addresses itself to problems that arise out of our attempts to make sense of the world as our experience presents it to us.

Now, the basic concepts in whose terms we transact our experiential business are in general infused with our understanding of the world's facts. These concepts are not designed for use in "every possible world", but for use in *this* world. They arise from the need to handle communicatively the materials of our experience, and are geared to the realities that we encounter and manipulate in the course of everyday life. Their import and their applicability relate to how matters *do* stand, and not to how they *might* conceivably stand by some "stretch of the imagination". They are concerned with our understanding of the world's actual arrangements and their component elements are connected by contingent rather than necessary linkages. Even when philosophers deliberate normatively about how things *should* be (in contrast to how they actually are), they are nevertheless concerned primarily with some aspect of the real (with how you or I should behave, and not how the nonexistent individuals of some nonexistent world should comport themselves). In consequence, philosophical deliberations

rest on a basis of reality-oriented fact or supposition, connected to the world as our experience indicates it to be.[5]

The concepts we standardly use to think about the arrangements of the real—and which accordingly lie at the basis of our philosophical reflections—are of an essentially *composite* character. But rather than representing a combination of elements united by purely theoretical considerations, *the concurrence involved in such concepts rests on a strictly empirical or experiential foundation*. Their unity is a unity of experience—as the following illustrations show.

(1) Our concept of PERSONAL IDENTITY views the sameness of persons through a fusion of *bodily continuity* (tracking through space and time) and *continuity of personality* (memory, habits, tastes, dispositions, skills, etc.). (Moreover, each of these is itself composite.)

(2) Our concept of PERSONS involves the conjoining of *mind* and *body*, and preserves a mutually accordant functioning of mental and bodily activity, thus manifesting two very different sets of characteristic powers and dispositions.

(3) Our concept of VALUE (in the sense of "social justice is something he values") fuses three sorts of factors: covert ("mentalistic" thought, motivation, rationalization), transitional (verbal behavior in affording *vis-à-vis* others some defense, explanation, or justification of one's acts), and overt (actual physical behavior).

(4) Our concept of BELIEF coordinates mentalistic dispositions to think and overt physicalistic dispositions to action.

Let us consider just one example in detail. Observe that both key factors at issue in belief mental disposition and overt behavior in appropriate circumstances—must come together before it is proper to speak of believing. His mental condition alone does not establish that actually *X* believes that a bomb is shortly to go off in the room if his every act belies this (under suitable conditions—e.g., he has no wish to commit suicide). But evasive behavior alone will not clinch the matter either, if there is sufficient evidence that *X*'s every thought—tacit and professed—indicates that he is nowise under an impression that a bomb is present. Both sets of factors—mind states and action dispositions—must be suitably coordinated before we can

unproblematically speak of *X*'s having a belief. Otherwise, we could not appropriately say that *X* believes that *P*, but would have to use some complex circumlocution, "*X*, while not accepting *P* is the case, acts as though it were", "*X*, while maintaining that *P* is the case certainly does not behave (say, by betting) in an accordant fashion", or the like. Both of these factors—cognitive and behavioral dispositions—come together in the composite idea of a belief. Their consilience and consonance is not a matter of logic, however, but rather one of fact—of how experience shows us what things do in the world.

And this case is typical. For the fact is that all of those various philosophically critical concepts are both multicriterial and fact-coordinative:

(i) They are *multicriterial* because in each case a plurality of (in principle separable) components is involved, for example, in the case of personal identity, both bodily continuity and continuity of personality play a pivotal role.[6]

(ii) They are *fact-coordinative* because in each case the theoretically separable but concept-joined criterial factors are held together in an integrative fusion by facts or purported facts—that is, by our view of how the world actually works. (Thus in the case of personal identity we find that bodily continuity and continuity of personality generally and standardly *go together*.)

Concepts of this fact-coordinative sort conjoin factors whose unity is a matter of experience. They rest on presuppositions whose content is factual, reflecting a view of how things go in the world. They are empirically conditioned, being developed and deployed against an experiential backdrop—a Weltanschauung, or rather some miniscule sector thereof. The crucial contribution of such an empirical basis is to underwrite the *de facto* conjoining of a plurality of factors that are in principle separable from one another. Because these factors are thus coordinated, we are *spared any need to make up our mind* as to which of them is ultimately determinative or decisive for the concept's applicability. Experience assures that certain purely theoretical possibilities are of no effective practical concern because the things they split apart actually go together.

In our philosophizing, the concepts in whose terms theses and theories are articulated are accordingly fact-laden through their gearing to "the domain of experience"—that is, to the way in which things usually and nor-

mally go. Such conceptual machinery hinges on "the ordinary course of things" as we actually encounter it. It reflects our experience of the world by indicating how things standardly go in the domain of what comes to our notice. And this feature of its conceptual frame of reference must inevitably inform and condition the way in which we can transact our philosophical business. It means that we must—or should—recognize philosophy's commitment to "the real world", albeit in a way very different from the commitment of classical science and traditional philosophy.

3. THE COGNITIVE STANCE OF SCIENCE VS. THAT OF ORDINARY LIFE

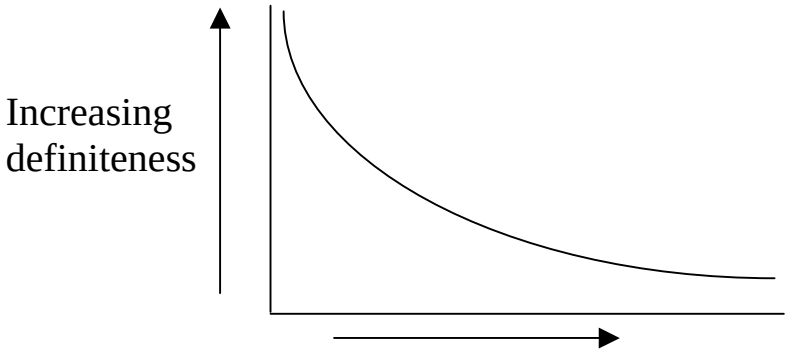
Throughout the sphere of our cognitive concerns there is an inherent tension between generality and security. Increased security can generally be purchased for our claims at the price of decreased accuracy and precision. We estimate the height of a tree at around 25 feet. We are *quite sure* that the tree is 25 + 3 feet high. We are *virtually certain* that its height is 25 + 10 feet. But we are *completely and absolutely sure* when the item at issue is indeed a tree, that its height is between 1 inch and 100 yards. Of this we are "totally sure" and "certain beyond the shadow of a doubt", "as certain as we can be of anything in the world", "so sure that we would be willing to stake our life on it", and the like. For any sort of plausible claim whatsoever, there is always a characteristic trade-off between its evidential *security* (or probability), on the one hand, and, on the other, its contentual *definiteness* (exactness, detail, precision, etc.). The prevailing situation is as depicted by the concave curve presented in Display 1. Throughout the range of our information-gathering inquiries, the epistemic lay of the land is such that it is in effect impracticable to make one's generalization at once both highly interesting (i.e., general) and highly safe (i.e., secure). And in philosophy, above all, the price we have to pay for achieving tenable theories is to curtail their sweep.

Traditionally, science seeks to operate at the top of the diagram. It foregoes the security of indefiniteness, in striving for the maximal achievable universality, precision, exactness, and the like. The mathematically precise law-claims of natural science involve no hedging, no fuzziness, no incompleteness, and no exceptions—they are *strict*: precise, wholly explicit, exceptionless. When investigating the melting point of lead, that physicist has no interest in claiming that *most* pieces of (pure) lead will *quite likely* melt at *somewhere around* this temperature. (Even where science deals in prob-

abilities, it deals with them in a way that characterizes *exactly* how they must comport themselves.)

Display 1

THE DECLINE OF SECURITY WITH INCREASING DEFINITENESS



Note: Given suitable ways of measuring security (*s*) and definiteness (*d*), the curve at issue can be supposed to be the equilateral hyperbola:
$s \times d = \text{constant}$

By contrast, the ground rules of ordinary life discourse are altogether different. Here we operate at the right-hand side of the diagram. When *we* assert in ordinary life that "peaches are delicious", we mean something like "most people will find the eating of suitably grown and duly matured peaches a relatively pleasurable experience." Such statements have all sorts of built-in hedges and safeguards like "more or less", "in ordinary circumstances", "by and large", "normally", "if other things are equal", and the like. They are not laws in the usual sense, but rules of thumb—a matter of practical lore rather than scientific rigor. In natural science, we deliberately accept risk by aiming at maximal definiteness—and thus at maximal informativeness and testability, but in ordinary life matters stand quite differently. After all, ordinary-life communication is a practically oriented endeavor carried on in a social context: it stresses such maxims as "Aim for security, even at the price of definiteness"; "Protect your credibility"; "Avoid misleading people, or—even worse—lying to them by asserting outright falsehoods"; "Do not take a risk and 'cry wolf'." The aims of or-

dinary-life discourse are primarily geared to the processes of social interaction and the coordination of human effort. In this context, it is crucial that we seek to maintain credibility and acceptance in our communicative efforts—that we establish and maintain a good reputation for reliability and trustworthiness. In the framework of common-life discourse, we thus take our stance at a point far removed from that of a mathematically precise "science", as this domain was traditionally cultivated. Our concern is not with the precise necessities but perforce with the looser commonalities of things.

The crucial fact for present purposes is that in this matter of definiteness vs. security, as in others, philosophy stands on the side of everyday life. The issues are so large and complex and the data we have are so tenuous in their bearing, that we have little realistic choice but to compromise definiteness (generality, precision, universality) for the sake of security (tenability, plausibility). If we are not content to join the sceptic in leaving the arena of deliberation empty-handed, we have to be prepared to be realistic about what the deliberations of philosophy can actually accomplish. If we wish to achieve tenable answers to the deep and far-reaching questions that we pose in this domain, then we simply have to be prepared to abandon an unrealistic demand for universality and necessity and be prepared to settle for the more qualified and tentative suppositions that the data of experience are in a position to underwrite. In this domain, we have to be prepared to do the best we can with the resources at our disposal here and now. Foregoing all unrealistic demands for an unrealizable perfection in our philosophizing, we have to make the most we can of the possibilities that are, in a realistic sense of the term, actually *available* to us. Rather than hankering after abstract connections that hold exceptionlessly for any imaginable world, we are to look to what is standardly (normally) true in the actual world we live in.

Aristotle's biology and physics was full of general rules to which there are sporadic exceptions. The rules say how things go "on the whole" (*hôs epi to polu:* in general); the exceptions "prove" the rule. But this points towards a pre-modern conception of science that the necessitarianism of early modern (i.e., pre-statistical) science simply abandoned. And in science we may indeed be able to get by with the dichotomy of *either strictly universal or merely statistical*. But in philosophy we cannot. For better or worse the spirit of Aristotelian science is still with us here.

Standardism provides our best practicable route to security in philosophical generalization. Humans—and indeed whatever intelligent beings

there may be in the cosmos—are innovative beings, capable of a deliberate introduction of novelty. Through intellectual insight and practical ingenuity, intelligent agents are able to bring into being things that have not previously been in existence, and, in particular, to achieve new knowledge about old issues. Such innovation—be it in intellectual or physical matters—is by its very nature a venture in pattern breaking. It alters the landscape of what has heretofore been the case. But while innovation, and the broadening of horizons generally alters what *has always been* the case, it is less likely to change what is *normally* the case. Clearly, the fabric of standardist (rather than universalist) generalizations is far less susceptible to being disturbed by novelty.

In philosophy, our most promising pathway to reasonable security lies by way of curtailing the "scientific" pretensions of our claims. When we generalize in the manner of saying that people pursue life, liberty, and happiness we do not achieve rigid universality but operate on a standardistic plane. What standardism would accordingly have us do is to forego—or at least radically curtail—our aspirations to necessitarianism in philosophy.[7]

4. THE DANGER OF ASKING TOO MUCH

Its insistence on avoiding dogmatism by refusing to lay down rules beyond the prospect of exception—this very rule itself included—is what characterizes standardism and sets it apart form the fixation of traditional philosophy on what is rigidly necessary and strictly universal. The salient feature of standardism is its relaxed approach to generalizations—its willingness to contemplate what is normally so, instead of hankering after what must be so invariable and exceptionlessly. It is content to let us talk about how matters stand "in the first approximation" rather than strictly and solely "in the final analysis". Standardism is prepared to pursue the process of generalization in a manner that is more "realistic" and "relaxed" than anything that traditional philosophy is prepared to contemplate.

But just why should we draw in our philosophical horns in such a manner? Why should one abandon the science-imitating universalist/necessitarian line of traditional philosophizing in favor of the generalistic/normalistic formulations of a more relaxed, humanistic approach? Primarily because we ought to be realistic. For their rooting in the inherently normalistic concepts of everyday discussion requires philosophical issues to be addressed in standardistic terms. Philosophy, after all, takes its departure from a concern for our workaday human affairs: even its concern for "the world" is

(unlike that of natural science) anthropocentrically us-oriented, ultimately preoccupied with the bearing of the issues on *our* concerns—on our knowledge, our role, our prospects, etc. Preeminently, philosophy's concern with logic is as an instrumentality of *our* reasoning, and with cosmology as a means to understanding *our* universe. And this focus upon the human dimension has important ramifications. For universal generalizations in human affairs are almost invariably undermined by its essentially chaotic aspect—by the ineliminable role of chance and luck in matters of human concern. The general rules that can be laid down to characterize our situation—be it in ethics, in epistemology, in metaphysics, or wherever—have to align with the general course of things because unusual and unforeseeable confluences and complications can almost always intrude to upset the apple cart. But this means that at the level of our philosophical convictions, chaos, so to speak, can and often does intervene to call off all the usual bets, abrogating the usual order of things to which our generalizations are—and must be—attuned.

The obvious difficulty of universalistic and necessitarian philosophizing is its commitment to uniformity and universality—to the idea that the relevant relationships can generally be captured in one unrestrictedly exceptionless rule. This contemplates a conceptual tidiness that may indeed be present in pure mathematics, but is very questionable in matters of philosophy. For —as noted above—the issues we deal with in philosophy take root in the concepts of everyday life. The factors at issue are not technical artifacts projected for their own abstract interest, but must always be representable in terms of the commonplace descriptive machinery of our everyday communication. Accordingly, they simply do not admit of a purely theoretical systematization that abstracts from the experienced course of things.

In philosophical matters, our prospects of establishing rigorously universal theses are unpromising. Reluctant to face this fact, however, philosophers have generally striven to answer their questions in terms of claims regarded as universal, necessary, and a priori. Traditionally they look to the *exact* sciences—and generally are the exact *formal* sciences, logic and mathematics—as their model. But as the history of the subject shows all too clearly, these programmatic ambitions have produced great problems. By asking too much, philosophers have in consequence obtained too little. Their demands for a *conjoint* realization of high definiteness and high security has put them "off the curve" of epistemic feasibility, so that they are in the end destined to failure. A not insignificant part of the reason for philosophical controversy and dissensus lies in the effective impossibil-

ity of securing an adequate probative/evidential basis for the sort of exaggeratedly ambitious claims that are traditionally projected in this domain. The nature of philosophical issues is such as to pose the ever-present threat that if we will only be satisfied with theses that are absolutely universal and necessary, we shall wind up with having nothing at all.

A standardistic focus upon the usual (rather than necessary) course of things accordingly becomes a sensible and realistic proposition. For standardism enables us to achieve various important desiderata:

1. An increased security for our theses, enabling us to feel a firmer ground under our feet.

2. An improved methodological grasp—it being far easier to spot how things generally go than to establish that they must always and invariably stand in a certain wise.

3. An enhanced persuasiveness for our position—it being much simpler to convince people that things standardly and normally stand X-wise than to convince them that they must be so inevitably.

It is, in sum, not insignificantly to the advantage of standardism in philosophy that with respect to the large issues of the field normality is incomparably easier to secure than universality, seeing that an appeal to commonalities of people's experience, to their sense of the ordinary and primitive course of things, is something both straightforward and convincing.

The overly ambitious nature of classically necessitarian philosophy makes it effectively impossible to provide resolutions to the problems that readily convince people of their acceptability. An empirical approach, by contrast, offers promise of greater effectiveness in the realization of more limited objectives. It offers the prospect of achieving a plausible resolution for issues that we would otherwise simply be unable to resolve satisfactorily. Accordingly, an empirical approach that is satisfied with theses geared to how things stand generally and usually (rather than universally and necessarily) affords our best promise for retaining answers to our philosophical questions in a way that is at once informative, defensible, and adequate to the problem-situation of the philosophical domain.

By asking for more—by insisting on principles that are absolutely universal and necessary—we would effectively assure ourselves of getting nothing at all. The problems are so intricate, the issues so complex, the

evidence so tenuous, that by demanding theses of a high degree of contentual precision and definiteness we render it impossible to evidentiate *anything* with a degree of security adequate to the realization of intellectual comfort. In philosophical contexts, we can (generally) do no better than to support theses regarding how matters stand *in general* with respect to the questions at issue; in this domain, strict generalizations are (generally) not cogently substantiable. Insofar as we want viable answers—insofar as the security and tenability is a goal of ours—we are well advised to proceed conservatively, staking our philosophical claims in a way that is cautious and qualified. And so, standardism comes into its own.

Historically, philosophers have all too often seen philosophizing as a labor of pure reason, holding with Spinoza, that "It is not in the nature of reason to regard things not as contingent, but as necessary" (*Ethics*, II, 44). They construe philosophizing as committed to necessitarian aspirations by its very nature as a venture in rational inquiry. But the ample course of our experience with the discipline indicates that this position is altogether unavailing—that in philosophy, as elsewhere, reason without experience is blind. And once we accept this, and acknowledge that philosophizing too has an experiential dimension by virtue of which its deliverances become to some extent contingent and vulnerable to the cold winds of experiential change, then we must also acknowledge that the deliverances of philosophy will not stand secure against novelty of circumstance, but will be fragile and defeasible in the light of the altered conditions unfolding in a world where chance and chaos play a significant role. A philosophical doctrine must be flexible—it cannot stand fixed and unchanging but must, like all else that has life, learn to adapt—or else die.

Consider just one example. Historically, positivism came to grief because its champions could no longer defend the distinctions pivotal to its articulation (analytic/synthetic, conceptual/factual, etc.) against the challenges and objections that could be—and were—made against such procrustean dichotomies. Both the supporters and opponents of positivism saw such distinctions as being absolutely hard and fast—universal and absolute. The idea of a standardistic softening of these dichotomies—of linking their applicability to normal issues and ordinary circumstances—did not occur to any of the parties to the dispute. But once this prospect arises, matters look very different. Take the analytic/synthetic distinction between what is true on conventional and what is true on factual grounds. To investigate the tenability of "All (unbroken) knives have blades" it would be foolish indeed to inspect the knives in our kitchen drawers—or our museums. Lin-

guistic usage suffices—if an implement does not have a blade we just do not *call* it a knife. Statements like "Knives have blades" are thus clearly analytic. On the other hand "No Minoan knives were made of steel" cannot be investigated on the basis of linguistic usage alone—we have to go out into "the real world" and examine artifacts. Such statements are clearly synthetic. The distinction involved—the line between *analytic* and *synthetic*—is clear enough for the standard situation of normal cases where it is possible to understand and implement the issues in a more or less straightforward way. It is only if we seek to operate by means of universal rules that are to apply rigidly all across the board in an altogether hand-and-foot way that the analytic/synthetic distinction runs into trouble. Had the positivists been prepared to approach their concerns in the more relaxed manner of a standardistic approach, their doctrine would have taken on a more flexible and vastly more tenable guise. It is after the course of medicine—and kindness to a philosopher's generalization in standardistic rather than universalistic terms.

It could, of course, be objected that this diminishing of demands is incompatible with the very nature of philosophy—that whether one likes it or not, many or most philosophers have in fact been committed to the pursuit of the strictly universal necessary. But, of course, it is one thing to ask for something and another to obtain it. The merit of standardism's lowering of demands lies exactly in the fact that this affords a better prospects of achieving meaningful answers to our philosophical questions and providing for viable resolutions of the problems of the field.

Its seeming weakness is actually the basis of philosophical standardism's strength. For given the complexity of the issues, it is clear that such an "empirical"—that is, experience-oriented—approach that rests satisfied with theses geared to how things stand generally and usually (rather than universally and necessarily) affords our best prospect for obtaining answers to our philosophical questions in a way that is at once informative and defensible. When we address those "big issues" of human nature and action in their natural and social context, our chances of securing viable answers are vastly improved by looking to the usual course of things rather than pursuing the will-o'-the wisp of abstract general principles in a quest for strictly exceptionless universality. The aspirations of a standardistic philosophy may be more modest, but they are for that very reason also much more realistic. If we indeed *want* answers to our philosophical problems we have to be prepared to accept them as they are in practice attainable.

5. WHY PHILOSOPHY CANNOT SIMPLY ABANDON THOSE "IMPRECISE" CONCEPTS OF PRE-SYSTEMIC DISCOURSE

Given that the ordinary concepts in whose terms we communicate about our everyday experiences cannot serve traditional philosophy's idealized demands, why not simply abandon them altogether in this domain? For good reason. To abandon them in favor of other concepts would have the serious drawback that in taking this course we effectively leave the traditional arena of philosophical discussion. For those "imperfect and imprecise" concepts provide the raw materials for philosophy and are an essential part of its concerns. The issues with which our philosophizing begins, and for the sake of whose understanding and elucidation it carries on its work, are taken in the first instance from the realm of experience. Those pre-systematic concepts characterize the ways in which we conceive of the experience which is the stuff of life—and thus ultimately the stuff of philosophy as well.

The concepts that figure centrally in philosophical discussions are always borrowed from everyday life or from its elaboration in science. The discussions of philosophy always maintain some connection to these pre- or extra-philosophical notions; they cannot simply rid themselves of those standard conceptions that are the flesh and blood of our thinking in everyday life. The philosopher's "knowledge" and "ignorance", his "right" and his "wrong" must be those of ordinary people—or at least keep very close to them. His "space" and "time" and "matter" must be those of the natural scientist. In abandoning the concepts of our pre-philosophical concerns in favor of word creations of some sort, the philosopher thereby also abandons the problems that constitute the enterprise's very reason for being. To talk *wholly* in terms of technical concepts that differ from the ordinary ones as radically as the physicist's concept of *work* differs from the plain man's notion is in effect to change the subject. And whatever appeal this step may have, it is not one that we can take *within* the framework of the professed objective of a clarificatory analysis of philosophical issues. It is neither candid nor helpful to pass off the wolf of concept abandonment as the sheep of concept clarification. It would be a deeply mistaken procedure to practice conceptual "clarification" in such a manner as to destroy the very items we are purportedly clarifying.

Of course, philosophers are free to invent their own language and to introduce their own technical terminology. But if they are to use it for communicating with the rest of us, they must explain it to us, and this is some-

thing they have to do in a language that we can understand, in our language—the language of everyday life. It is gearing to the normal, ordinary course of things means that the concepts of everyday life—and those of philosophy with them—resist the introduction of surgical precision. They lack that merely abstract integrity of purely conceptual coherence that alone could enable them to survive in the harsh light of theoretical clarity.

The issues that constitute philosophy's prime mission are not—at bottom—technical matters domestic to the field itself. They are issues that arise in the conditions of everyday life and in the sciences; question not, to be sure, *within* but rather *about* these domains of experience. Without them, philosophy would lose its point, its very reason for being. The technical issues of philosophy are always a means toward extra-philosophical ends. We address philosophical issues to resolve further issues that enable us to resolve yet further issues, and so on, until at last we arrive back at questions posed in the pre-philosophical *lingua franca* of experience. What makes philosophy the enterprise it is is its connectability to the pre-systemic issues of our experiential world, that are the very reason for being of our philosophical concerns.

All philosophical deliberation—theoretical and practical alike—are rooted in the pre-theoretical standards (cognitive, practical, moral, etc.). By their very pre-theoretical nature the fundamental ideas involved are themselves not up to the demands of theoretical precision. However, task of philosophical elucidation is not to abolish these but to clarify them and to harmonize them in the best realizable way. Such explanations enable us to become self-comprehending—we now know better what before we saw only through a glass, darkly. It clarifies, energizes, and to some extent rationalizes and reforms our pre-systematic ideas, beliefs, and commitments, but it does not—cannot—abrogate them. (Nor can it provide them with an external, altogether "presupposition free" basis or foundation for their justification[8].)

The philosopher cannot at one and the same time practice his craft and forsake the everyday and scientific conceptions that provide the stage setting of his discipline. The philosopher is thus caught between a rock and a hard place—unable to accept those experientially biased conceptions of pre-philosophical usage wholly at face value, and yet unable to live without them either because the core problems of the field take their root and draw their life from them.[9]

If the deliberations of philosophy were not interconnected with those of human experience through a process of conceptual interlinkage, then they

would become *pointless*. The philosopher's claim to address the problems that arise and are initially posed in our pre-philosophical conceptions would ring hollow if the results he achieves had no discernible relationship to them. To cease to ask about the value of the world, about humanity's place in the scheme of things, and about our interrelations with our fellows is to give up the very project at issue. To abandon those big questions that arise in the context of our empirical interaction with the world is to abandon philosophy itself. The very reason for being of the philosophical enterprise lies in its historic mission of making us to resolve our questions about the world as they actually arise—in terms of the concepts and categories of everyday life. To abandon this enterprise is to "change the subject"—and while positivistically minded philosophers have, in all times and places, advocated just this, it is a course that is at odds with the palpable interest and importance of the issues.

Technical philosophy accordingly no more *abolishes* that ultimate level of pre-philosophically experiential issues than scientific medicine *abolishes* those pre-scientific symptoms and disabilities toward whose management its efforts are ultimately directed. Philosophers need to have recourse to the terminology of experience in everyday life and in science since this provides the ultimate terms of reference for philosophical deliberations. Maintaining connection with these pre-systemic issues (and thereby with the conceptual framework in whose terms they are articulated) is essential to the project of providing a basis for understanding the world we live in. For philosophical deliberations to lose their bearing upon the issues that can be posed in the pre-systemic *lingua franca* of human experience would be to become *irrelevant*.

In its explanatory endeavors, philosophy is thus continuous with the empirical domain of ordinary experience from which its issues ultimately emerge. And to connect with these experience-oriented questions of science and quotidian life, we must keep in contact with the concepts in whose terms they are posed. Of course, as its work gets well under way, philosophy eventually becomes increasingly specialized and technical. It turns to issues needed to address further issues themselves arising out of those critical concerns. And so it distances itself from the concepts in whose terms we discuss our pre-philosophical experience of things and only talks about matters required for talking about matters needed for talking about things. At the level of doctrine—of contentions and answers—there is eventually an increasing remoteness and thus little if any overlap between the discourse of technical philosophy and that of ordinary life. But

at the level of question-resolution some thread of substantive linkage, some filiation of relevancy to our pre-systematic concerns, will always be present. The relevance of philosophy as a source of useful insight into the problems regarding the world we live in hinges crucially on this connection with the familiar world of our experience, on this realistic intent to deal—in the final analysis—with the issues we ordinarily encounter in experience.

One should not, to be sure, try to maintain this sort of conceptual conservatism in science. Why then should the situation be so different in philosophy? For the simple and sufficient reason that in philosophy it is *understanding* pure and simple that is of prime concern to us (gaining insight with respect to our pre-systematic questions), while the characterizing concerns of science is very different, something that lies in the range of *praxis* in focusing on the issues of successful prediction and interaction—or cognitive and operational control. This difference between our "merely epistemic" and our "largely practical" concerns is of paramount significance in amounting for the difference between the position of the philosopher and that of the scientist. (And it explains, for example, why in quantum physics one is perfectly happy—and perfectly entitled—simply to turn one's back on the principles of our ordinary, everyday conception of the world's *modus operandi*, something that the philosopher is simply not in a position to do.)

There is, of course, the prospect of ceasing to bother about those pre-systematic concepts. A theoretician of "enlightenment"—or of consciousness elevation—may indeed urge us to abandon those everyday concepts as somehow misguided and misleading. Such a step could perhaps be urged on grounds of shifting our ideas onto a less conservative, more sophisticated plane. But it could certainly not be taken in an effort to persuade us to improve the practice of philosophy and to help us to engage in its pursuit in a more rigorous and cogent way. For in abandoning those pre-systematic concepts we also take the more radical course of abandoning philosophy itself, seeing that the mission-definitive questions of the field are formulated in their terms.

To be sure, this radical prospect of abandoning philosophy exists—a prospect which sceptics have urged upon us since classical antiquity.[10] But this is an option whose price is not inexpensive. The fact is that we humans have a very real and material stake in securing viable answers to our questions as to how things stand in the world we live in. In situations of cognitive frustration and bafflement we cannot function effectively as the sort of creature nature has compelled us to become. Confusion and ignorance—

even in such "theoretical" and "abstruse" matters as those with which philosophy deals—yield psychic dismay and discomfort. The old saying is perfectly true: philosophy bakes no bread. But it is also no less true that man does not live by bread alone. The physical side of our nature that impels us to eat, drink, and be merry is just one of its sides. *Homo sapiens* requires nourishment for the mind as urgently as nourishment for the body. We seek knowledge not only because we wish, but because we must. For us humans, the need for information, for knowledge to nourish the mind, is every bit as critical as the need for food to nourish the body. Cognitive vacuity or dissonance is as distressing to us as hunger or pain. We want and need our cognitive commitments to comprise an intelligible story, to give a comprehensive and coherent account of things. Bafflement and ignorance—to give suspensions of judgment the somewhat harsher name they deserve—exact a substantial price.

The quest for cognitive orientation in a difficult world represents a deeply practical requisite for us. That basic demand for information and understanding presses in upon us and we must do (and are pragmatically justified in doing) what is needed for its satisfaction. Knowledge itself fulfills an acute practical need. And this is where philosophy comes in, in its attempt to grapple with our basic cognitive concerns. The impetus to philosophy lies in our very nature as rational inquirers: as beings who have questions, demand answers, and want these answers to be as cogent as the circumstances allow. Cognitive problems arise when matters fail to meet our expectations, and the expectation of rational order is the most fundamental of them all. The fact is simply that we must philosophize; it is a situational imperative for a rational creature such as ourselves.

Philosophy thus cannot simply abandon these pre-philosophical everyday-life concepts that have emerged to reflect our experience. And its need to retain them militates powerfully on behalf of standardism. For those concepts and categories are deeply entrenched in our view of how things normally go in the world. There is no viable alternative to accommodating the presuppositional needs of our everyday concepts in the deliberations of philosophy. Given the origin and nature of its questions, philosophy just cannot escape coming to terms with the commitment of our concepts to the ordinary and normal course of things as experience presents it to us. The development and the interpretation of a philosophical position has to unfold against the background of what constitutes an experience in the broader and more inclusive sense of this term.[11]

NOTES

1 See Peter Unger "An Argument for Sceptics," *Philosophical Exchange,* vol. 1 (1974).

2 The reasons for this situation and the modalities of its management is examined in detail in the author's *The Strife of Systems* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985).

3 Some of the considerations of this section are dealt with in greater detail in the author's *Metaphilosophical Inquiries* (Princeton, 1993).

4 See Rudolf Carnap, *The Logical Foundations of Probability,* 2nd edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), sect. 2.

5 This is least clear with respect to those philosophical theories that address issues of "pure" mathematics and logic—those at work meta-mathematics and meta-logic, and those appertaining to regions very far removed from our everyday experience of the *physical* world. But they are not, of course, comparably removed from the realm of our conceptualizing experience. The objects of mathematics (numbers and structures) may have no "natural history"—but this is clearly *not* the case with respect to our conceptualizing *thought* about such objects.

6 The discussion of cluster concepts in Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953) bears upon this issue.

7 A standardism true to its own spirit cannot, of course, insist on the rigid impossibility of ever securing necessary truths.

8 Not only have all attempts at providing such "absolute" foundations failed, but they are in fact predestined to fail. Any attempt to articulate such a validating theory can make sense only in the setting of a pre-established standard of adequacy and thus widen the framework of those very pre-theoretical standards that we are allegedly trying to validate. We can neither theoretically validate those pre-theoretical standards nor yet dispense with them, and recognizing this status of affairs is a part of what philosophical wisdom is all about.

9 On these issues see the section on "Ideal Language Philosophy versus Ordinary Language Philosophy" in the introduction to Richard Rorty's anthology, *The Linguistic Turn* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

10 For a more recent version see Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

11 For further detail in some of this chapter's issues see the author's *Philosophical Standardism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994).

Chapter 9

THE MESSAGE
On the Formative Role of Apories in Philosophical Deliberation

1. CONSISTENCY AND APORIES

The methods of cogent philosophizing root in the very aims of the enterprise. Philosophizing may "begin in wonder", as Aristotle said, but it soon runs into puzzlement and perplexity. We have many and far-reaching questions about our place in the world's scheme of things and endeavor to give answers to them. But even apart from interpersonal disagreement it all too commonly transpires that the answers that people incline to give to some questions are incompatible with those they incline to give to others. Cognitive dissonance rears its ugly head and inconsistency arises. And the impetus to remove such puzzlement and perplexity is a prime mover of philosophical innovation.

An apory is a group of contentions that are individually plausible but collectively inconsistent.[1] The things we incline to maintain issue in contradiction. One can encounter apories in many areas—ordinary life, mathematics, and science included—but they are particularly prominent in philosophy. For the wide-ranging and speculative nature of the field—the fact that it addresses questions we want to raise but almost dare not ask—means that the range of our involvements and commitments is more extensive, diversified, and complex here than elsewhere. For it lies in the nature of the field that in philosophy one must often reason from mere *plausibilities*, from tempting theses that have some substantial claim on our acceptance but are very far from certain. And so it can transpire here that the theses we endorse are inconsistent—conflicting plausibilities rather than assured compatible truths. Thus aporetic situations arise—circumstances in which the various theses one is minded to accept prove to be collectively incompatible.

Consider an historical example drawn from the Greek theory of virtue:

1. If virtuous action does not produce happiness (pleasure) then it is motivationally impotent and generally pointless.

2. Virtue in action is eminently pointful and should provide a powerfully motivating incentive.

3. Virtuous action does not always—and perhaps not even generally—produce happiness (pleasure).

It is clearly impossible—on grounds of mere logic alone—to maintain this family of contentions. At least one member of the group must be abandoned. And so we face the choice among:

1-Abandonment: Maintain that virtue has substantial worth quite on its own account even if it does not produce happiness or pleasure (Stoicism, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius).

2-Abandonment: Dismiss virtue as ultimately unfounded and unrationalizable, viewing morality as merely a matter of the customs of the country (Sextus Empiricus) or the will of the rulers (Plato's Thrasymachus).

3-Abandonment: Insist that virtuous action does indeed always yield happiness or pleasure—at any rate to the right-minded. Virtuous action is inherently pleasure-producing for fully rational agents, so that the virtue and happiness are inseparably interconnected (Plato, the Epicureans).

This illustration exemplifies the situation of an aporetic cluster: an inconsistent group of plausible contentions to which the only sensible reaction is the abandonment of one or another of them.

Doing nothing is not a rationally viable option when we are confronted with a situation of aporetic inconsistency. Mere rationality constrains that something has to give. Some one (at least) of those incompatible contentions at issue must be abandoned. Apories constitute situations of *forced choice:* an inconsistent family of theses confronts us with an unavoidable choice among alternative positions.

Apories—collective inconsistency among individually plausible contentions—give structure to the philosophical landscape. They show how vari-

ous positions are interlocked in a mutual interrelationship that does not meet the eye at first view because the areas at issue may be quite disparate.

1. Some facts can be explained satisfactorily.

2. No explanation of a fact is (fully) satisfactory if it uses unexplained facts.

3. Any satisfactory explanation must be noncircular: it must always involve some *further* facts (facts distinct from the fact that is being explained) to provide materials for its explanatory work.

Premiss (3) indicates the need for unexplained explainers. Premiss (2) asserts that the presence of unexplained explainers prevents explanations from being satisfactory. Together they entail that there are no (fully) satisfactory explanations. But premiss (1) insists that satisfactory explanations exist. And so we face a contradiction. A forced choice among a fixed spectrum of alternatives confronts us. And there are just three exits from this inconsistency:

1-Abandonment: Explanatory scepticism.

2-Abandonment: Explanatory foundationalism. Insist that some facts are "obvious" or "self-evident" in a way that exempts them from any need for being explained themselves and make them available as "cost-free" inputs for the explanation of other facts.

3-Abandonment: Explanatory coherentism. Accept circular explanations as adequate in some cases ("very large circles").

We have the prospect of alternative resolutions—confined within a smallish, well-defined range of alternatives.

Such an analysis brings out a significant interrelationship that obtains in the theory of value between the issue of *observation* (as per (2)-rejection) and the issue of *confirmation* (as per (3)-rejection). It makes strange bedfellows among very different and seemingly disjoint doctrines.

When an apory confronts us, a forced choice among the propositions involved becomes unavoidable. One way or another we must "take a posi-

tion"—some particular thesis must be abandoned or, at the very least, amended.

An apory thus delineates a definite range of interrelated positions. It maps out a small sector of the possibility space of philosophical deliberation. And this typifies the situation in philosophical problem-solving, where, almost invariably, several distinct and discordant resolutions to a given issue or problem are available, none of which our cognitive data can exclude in an altogether decisive way.

For in the end any rational resolution of an apory calls for the rejection of some contentions for the sake of maintaining others. Strict logic alone dictates only *that* something must be abandoned; it does not indicate what. No particular resolutions are imposed by abstract rationality alone—by the mere "logic of the situation". (In philosophical argumentation one person's *modus ponens* is another's *modus tollens*.) It is always a matter of trade-offs, of negotiation, of giving up a bit of this in order to retain a bit of that.

Again consider the theory of morality developed in Greek ethical thought affords a good example of such an aporetic situation. Greek moral thinking inclined to the view that the distinction between right and wrong

(1) does matter;

(2) is based on custom (*nomos*);

(3) can only matter if grounded in the objective nature of things (*phusei*) rather than in mere custom.

Here too an aporetic problem arises. The inconsistency of these contentions led to the following resolutions:

Deny (1): Issues of right and wrong just don't matter—they are a mere question of power, of who gets to "lay down the law" (Thrasymachus).

Deny (2): The difference between right and wrong is not a matter of custom but resides in the nature of things (the Stoics).

Deny (3): The difference between right and wrong is only customary (*nomoi*) but does really matter all the same (Heraclitus).

We have here a paradigmatic example of an antinomy: a *theme* provided by an aporetic cluster of propositions, with *variations* set by the various ways of resolving this inconsistency. The problem of the philosopher is not one of inductive ampliation but of systemic reduction—of a restoration of consistency. And philosophers fail to reach a uniform result because this objective can always be accomplished in very different ways.

As such examples show, any particular resolution of an aporetic cluster is bound to be simply *one way among others*. The single most crucial fact about an aporetic cluster is that there will always be a variety of distinct ways of averting the inconsistency into which it plunges us. We are not only forced to choose, but specifically constrained to operate within a narrowly circumscribed range of choice.

But how to proceed? What is our standard of priority to be? Here we face a situation very different from that of reductio ad absurdum or of evidential reasoning. For in philosophy, our guidance for making these curtailments lies in the factor of systematicity. The operative principle at work here is that of achieving the optimum alignment with experience—the best overall balance of informativeness (answering questions and resolving problems) with plausibility by way of negotiating with the claims which on the basis of our relevant experience there is good reason to regard as true. We want answers to our questions but we want these answers to make up a coherent systematic whole. It is neither just answers we want (regardless of their substantiation) nor just safe claims (regardless of their lack of informativeness) but a reasonable mix of the two—a judicious balance that systematizes our commitments in a functionally effective way.[2] The situation in philosophy is accordingly neither one of pure speculation, where informativeness alone governs conflict resolution, nor one of scientific/inductive inquiry where evidential coherence governs this process, but a judicious combination of the two.[3]

In theory we could, of course, in such a case simply throw up our hands and abandon the entire cluster. But this total suspension of judgment is too great a price to pay. By taking this course of wholesale abandonment we would plunge into vacuity by foregoing answers to too many questions. We would curtail our information not only beyond necessity but beyond comfort as well, seeing that we have some degree of commitment to all members of the cluster and do not want to abandon more of them than we have to. Our best option—or only sensible option—is to try to localize the difficulty in order “to save what we can”.

Whenever we are confronted with an aporetic cluster, a plurality of resolutions is always available. The contradiction that arises from over-commitment can be resolved by abandoning any of several contentions, so that alternative ways of averting inconsistency can always be found.

If we have firm confidence in our reasonings, then it follows by the inferential principle of *modus tollens* that whenever a belief is rejected, one must also call into question some of the various (collectively compelling) reasons on whose basis this belief had been adopted. For example, if one rejects free will, then one must also reject one of the following (presumptive) initial reasons for espousing freedom of the will: "People are usually responsible for their acts", "People are only morally responsible for those acts that are done freely." The rejection of an accepted thesis at once turns the family of reasons for its adoption into an aporetic cluster. Apory, once present, tends to spread like wildfire through any rational system.

This line of consideration accounts for what is, on first view, a puzzling aspect of the field, namely, the prominence in the philosophical literature of counter-argumentation and refutatory discussions. In mathematics no one troubles to argue that fourteen or thirty-two is *not* a satisfactory solution to a certain problem. This would be pointless because the number of incorrect answers is endless. But when there is only a limited number of viable alternative candidates in the running, negative and eliminative argumentation will obviously come to play a much more substantial part.

It lies in the logical nature of things that there will always be multiple exits from aporetic inconsistency. For whenever such an antinomy confronts us, then no matter which particular resolution we ourselves may favor, and no matter how firmly we are persuaded of its merits, the fact remains that there will also be other, alternative ways of resolving the inconsistency. For a contradiction that arises from over-commitment can always be averted by abandoning various subgroups among the conflicting contentions, so that distinct awareness to averting inconsistency can always be found. As far as abstract rationality goes, alternative resolutions always remain open—resolutions leading to mutually contrary and inconsistent results. An aporetic cluster is thus an invitation to conflict: its resolution will be only one of a coordinated group of mutually discordant doctrines (positions, teachings, *doxa*). The cluster accordingly sets the stage for divergent "schools of thought" and provides the bone of contention for an ongoing controversy among them. In philosophy, any family of inconsistent theses spans a "doctrinal spectrum" that encompasses a variety of interrelated albeit incompatible positions.

2. APORETIC ANTINOMIES STRUCTURE THE ISSUES

It emerges against this background how it is that an aporetic perspective or philosophizing comes to be significantly instructive:

- We now see these propositions in their interrelational interconnectedness. We come to realize that they are related notwithstanding the prospect of a radical diversity of thematic subject matter.

- We are confronted in a very clear and urgent way with the need for choice insofar as it is truth that is our goal.

- We get a clear view of the battlefield—and are able to pinpoint with enhanced precision and detail exactly where the discordances between alternative parties are located.

Consider an example. The theory of morality developed in Greek ethical thought, which affords a good illustration of such an aporetic situation, was based on three plausible considerations:

(1) If virtue does not produce happiness, pleasure, then it is pointless.

(2) Virtue is not pointless—indeed it is extremely important.

(3) Virtue does not always yield happiness.

These, however, are collectively inconsistent. And three ways of averting inconsistency are available here:

Deny (1): Maintain that virtue is worthwhile entirely in itself, even if it does not produce happiness/pleasure (Stoics, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius).

Deny (2): Maintain that virtue is ultimately pointless and can be dismissed as a folly of the weak (nihilistic sophists, e.g. Plato's Thrasymachus).

Deny (3): Maintain that virtue is automatically bound to produce happiness (of itself always yields *real* pleasure)—so that the two are inseparably interconnected (Plato, the Epicureans).

We have here a paradigmatic example of an antinomy: a *theme* provided by an aporetic cluster of propositions, with *variations* arising from the various ways of resolving this inconsistency.

And this example illustrates any particular way out of an aporetic conflict is bound to be simply *one way among others*. The single most crucial fact about an aporetic cluster is that there will always be a variety of distinct ways of averting the inconsistency into which it plunges us. And in this light, the problem for the philosopher is not one of inductive ampliation but of systemic reduction—of a restoration of consistency through choices of priority. In general, to be sure, philosophers fail to reach a uniform result because this prioritization can in theory always be accomplished in very different ways. The crux is that different philosophers implement different priority systems in effecting such determinations about what must be made to give way. Any and every resolution of a philosophical antinomy represents a distinct—and distinctly different—position, an intellectual abode that someone caught up in the underlying apory may choose to inhabit, though sometimes no one does so.

The state of affairs we have been considering stands in an interesting and ironic contrast with that of Plato, that giant of philosophy. He taught that *sensation* yields contradictory results and leads to belief (*pistis*), whose "object can be said both to be and not to be" (*Republic*, Bk. V, 478). (Think of the sceptics' favorite example of the two hands, one held in hot water and the other in cold water, and then both plunged into lukewarm water.) And such incoherence means that sensory beliefs must be corrected by *dianoia*—by reason. As Plato thus saw it, the philosopher's theorizing is the saving resource capable of effecting a reconciliation between the conflicting data of sensory observation.

Their grounding in aporetic conflicts provides philosophical controversies with a natural structure that endows its problem areas with an organic unity. The various alternative ways of resolving such a cognitive dilemma present a restricted manifold of interrelated positions—a comparatively modest inventory of possibilities mapping out a family of (comparatively few) alternatives that span the entire spectrum of possibilities for averting inconsistency.[4] And the history of philosophy is generally sufficiently fertile and diversified that all the alternatives—all possible permutations and

combinations for problem resolution—are in fact tried out somewhere along the line.

Philosophical doctrines are accordingly not discrete and separate units that stand in splendid isolation. They are articulated and developed in reciprocal interaction. But their natural mode of interaction is *not* by way of mutual supportiveness. (How could it be, given the mutual exclusiveness of conflicting doctrines?) Rather, competition and controversy prevail. The search of the ancient Stoics and Epicureans (notably Hippias) for a universally "natural" belief system based on what is common to different groups (espousing different doctrines, customs, moralities, religions) is of no avail because no single element remains unaffected as one moves across the range of variation. Given that rival "schools" resolve an aporetic cluster in different and discordant ways, the area of agreement between them, though always there, is bound to be too narrow to prevent conflict. Alternative positions involve different priorities, and different priorities are by nature incompatible and irreconcilable.

Other illustrations are readily available. A metaphysical determinism that negates free will runs afoul of a traditionalistic ethical theory that presupposes it. A philosophical anthropology that takes human life to originate at conception clashes with a social philosophy that sees abortion as morally unproblematic. A theory of rights that locates all responsibility in the contractual reciprocity of freely consenting parties creates problems for a morality of concern for animals. And the list goes on and on.

4. DIALECTICS: A MECHANISM OF SYSTEM GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT AND THE ROLE OF DISTINCTIONS

One important insight that a resort to plausibility aporetics puts at our disposal relates to its revelation of developmental dialectics.

To be sure, Aristotle was right in saying that philosophy begins in wonder and that securing concerns to our questions is the aim of the enterprise. But of course we do not just want answers but coherent answers, seeing that these alone have a chance of being collectively true. The quest for consistency is an indispensable part of the quest for truth. The quest for consistency is one of the driving dynamic forces of philosophy.

But the cruel fact is that theorizing itself yields contradictory results. In moving from empirical observation to philosophical theorizing, we do not leave contradiction behind—it continues to dog our footsteps. And just as reason must correct sensation, so more refined and elaborate reason is al-

ways needed as a corrective for less refined and elaborate reason. The source of contradiction is not just in the domain of sensation but in that of reasoned reflection as well. We are not just *led into* philosophy by the urge to consistency, we are ultimately *kept* at it by this same urge.

Accordingly, aporetics affords not only a mapping the cartography of the battlefield of philosophical disputation, but also a tool for understanding and explaining the dialectic of historical development. For in breaking out of the cycle of inconsistency created by an aporetic cluster one has no choice but to abandon one or the other of the propositions involved. But in jettisoning this item it is often—perhaps even generally—possible to embody a distinction that makes it possible to retain something of what is being abandoned. Consider the following example:

(1) Every occurrence in nature is caused.

(2) Causes necessitate their consequences.

(3) Necessitation precludes contingency.

(4) Some occurrences in nature are contingent.

Someone who decides to break the cycle of inconsistency by dropping thesis (3) might nevertheless maintain that while causes do not necessitate these effects, they may nevertheless produce them (albeit in ways that are not at odds with the contingency of product).

To restore consistency among incompatible beliefs calls for abandoning some of them as they stand. In general, however, philosophers do not provide for consistency-restoration wholly by way of rejection. Rather, they have recourse to *modification*, replacing the abandoned belief with a duly qualified revision thereof. Since (by hypothesis) each thesis belonging to an aporetic cluster is individually attractive, simple rejection lets the case for the rejected thesis go unacknowledged. Only by modifying the thesis through a resort to distinctions can one manage to give proper recognition to the full range of considerations that initially led into aporetic difficulty.

Distinctions enable the philosopher to remove inconsistencies not just by the brute negativism of thesis *rejection* but by the more subtle and constructive device of thesis *qualification*. The crux of a distinction is not mere negation or denial, but the amendment of an untenable thesis into something positive that does the job better.

To examine the workings of this sort of process somewhat further, consider an aporetic cluster that set the stage for various theories of early Greek philosophy:

(1) Reality is one (homogeneous).

(2) Matter is real.

(3) Form is real.

(4) Matter and form are distinct sorts of things (heterogeneous).

In looking for a resolution here, one might consider rejecting (2). This could be done, however, not by simply *abandoning* it, but rather by *replacing* it—on the idealistic precedent of Zeno and Plato—with something along the following lines:

(2') Matter is not real as an independent mode of existence; rather it is merely quasi-real, a mere *phenomenon*, an appearance somehow grounded in immaterial reality.

The new quartet (1), (2'), (3), (4) is entirely cotenable.

Now in adopting this resolution, one again resorts to a *distinction*, namely that between

(i) Strict reality as self-sufficiently independent existence

and

(ii) Derivative or attenuated reality as a (merely phenomenal) product of the operation of the unqualifiedly real.

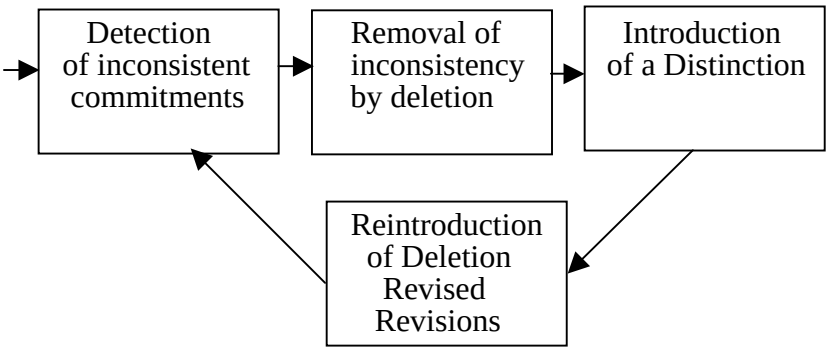
Use of such a distinction between unqualified and phenomenal reality makes it possible to resolve an aporetic cluster—yet not by simply *abandoning* one of those paradox-engendering theses but rather by *qualifying* it. (Note, however, that once we follow Zeno and Plato in replacing (2) by (2')—and accordingly reinterpret matter as representing a "mere phenomenon"—the substance of thesis (4) is profoundly altered; the old contention

can still be maintained, but it now gains a new significance in the light of new distinctions.)

Again, one might—alternatively—abandon thesis (3). However, one would then presumably not simply adopt "form is not real" but rather would go over to the qualified contention that "form is not *independently* real; it is no more than a transitory (changeable) state of matter." And this can be looked at the other way around, as saying "form *is* (in a way) real, although only insofar as it is taken to be no more than a transitory state of matter." This, in effect, would be the position of the atomists, who incline to see as implausible any recourse to mechanisms outside the realm of the material.

Aporetic inconsistency can always be resolved in this way; we can always "save the phenomena"—that is, retain the crucial core of our various beliefs in the face of apparent consideration—by introducing suitable distinctions and qualifications. Once apory breaks out, we can thus salvage our philosophical commitments by *complicating* them, through revisions in the light of appropriate distinctions, rather than abandoning them altogether.

The exfoliative development of philosophical systems is driven by the quest for consistency. Once an apory is resolved through the decision to drop one or another member of the inconsistent family at issue, it is only sensible and prudent to try to salvage some part of what is sacrificed by introducing a distinction. Yet all too often inconsistency will break out once more within the revised family of propositions that issues from the needed readjustments. And when this occurs, then the entire process is carried back to its starting point. The over-all course of development thus exhibits the following overall cyclical structure:


Detection of inconsistent commitments
Removal of inconsistency by deletion
Introduction of a Distinction
Reintroduction of Deletion Revised Revisions

The unfolding of distinctions has important ramifications in philosophical inquiry. As new concepts crop up in the wake of distinctions, new questions arise regarding their bearing on the issues. In the course of secur-

ing answers to our old questions we open up further questions, questions that could not even be asked before.

The historical course thus tracks an evolving process of apory resolution by means of distinctions. And this process of dialectical development imposes certain characteristic structural features upon the course of philosophical history:

- Concept proliferation—ever more elaborate concept manifolds evolve.

- Concept sophistication—ever more subtle and fine-drawn distinctions.

- Doctrinal elaboration—ever more extensively formulated theses and doctrines.

- System complexification—ever more elaborately articulated systems.

However, this generic characterization of the matter does not do adequate justice to how things actually work. To improve matters it is advisable to look at some actual "real-life" examples from the history of philosophy.

The history of philosophy is shot through with distinctions introduced to avert aporetic difficulties. Already in the dialogues of Plato, the first systematic writings in philosophy, we encounter distinctions at every turn. In Book I of the *Republic*, for example, Socrates' interlocutor quickly falls into the following apory:

(1) Rational people always pursue their own interests.

(2) Nothing that is in a person's interest can be disadvantageous to him.

(3) Even rational people sometimes do things that prove disadvantageous.

Here, inconsistency is averted by distinguishing between two senses of the "interests" of a person—namely what is *actually* advantageous to him and what he merely *thinks* to be so, that is, between *real* and *seeming* interests. Again, in the discussion of "nonbeing" in the *Sophist*, the Eleatic stranger entraps Theaetetus in an inconsistency from which he endeavors to extri-

cate himself by distinguishing between "nonbeing" in the sense of not existing *at all* and in the sense of not existing *in a certain mode*. For the most part, the Platonic dialogues present a dramatic unfolding of one distinction after another.

And this situation is typical in philosophy. The natural dialectic of problem solving here drives us even more deeply into drawing distinctions, so as to bring new, more sophisticated concepts upon the scene.

To be sure, distinctions are not needed if *all* that concerns us is averting inconsistency; simple thesis abandonment, mere refusal to assert, will suffice for that end. One can guard against inconsistency by avoiding commitment. But such sceptical refrainings create a vacuum. Distinctions are indispensable instruments in the (potentially never-ending) work of rescuing the philosopher's assertoric commitments from inconsistency while yet salvaging what one can. They become necessary if we are to maintain informative positions and provide answers to our questions. Whenever a particular aporetic thesis is rejected, the optimal course is not to abandon it altogether, but rather to minimize the loss by introducing a distinction by whose aid it may be retained *in part*. After all, we do have some commitment to the data that we reject, and are committed to saving as much as we can. (This, of course, is implicit in our treating those data as such in the first place.)

A distinction accordingly reflects a *concession*, an acknowledgment of some element of acceptability in the thesis that is being rejected. However, distinctions always bring a new concept upon the stage of consideration and thus put a new topic on the agenda. And they thereby present invitations to carry the discussion further, opening up new issues that were heretofore inaccessible. Distinctions are the doors through which philosophy moves on to new questions and problems. They bring new concepts and new theses to the fore.

Distinctions enable us to implement the irenic idea that a satisfactory resolution of aporetic clusters will generally involve a compromise that somehow makes room for all parties to the contradiction. The introduction of distinctions thus represents a Hegelian ascent—rising above the level of antagonistic doctrines to that of a "higher" conception, in which the opposites are reconciled. In introducing the qualifying distinction, we abandon that initial conflict-facilitating thesis and move toward its counterthesis—but only by way of a duly hedged synthesis. In this regard, distinction is a "dialectic" process. This role of distinctions is also connected with the thesis often designated as "Ramsey's Maxim". For with regard to disputes

about fundamental questions that do not seem capable of a decisive settlement, Frank Plumpton Ramsey wrote: "In such cases it is a heuristic maxim that the truth lies not in one of the two disputed views but in some third possibility which has not yet been thought of, which we can only discover by rejecting something assumed as obvious by both the disputants."[5] On this view, then, distinctions provide for a higher synthesis of opposing views; they prevent thesis abandonment from being an *entirely* negative process, affording us a way of salvaging something, of giving credit where credit is due, even to those theses we ultimately reject. They make it possible to remove inconsistency not just by the brute force of thesis rejection, but by the more subtle and constructive device of thesis qualification.

Philosophical distinctions are thus creative innovations. There is nothing routine or automatic about them—their discernment is an act of inventive ingenuity. They do not elaborate preexisting ideas but introduce new ones. They not only provide a basis for understanding better something heretofore grasped imperfectly but shift the discussion to a new level of sophistication and complexity. Thus, to some extent they "change the subject". (In this regard they are like the conceptual innovations of science which revise rather than explain prior ideas.)

Philosophy's recourse to ongoing conceptual refinement and innovation means that a philosophical position, doctrine, or system is never closed, finished, and complete. It is something organic, every growing and ever changing—a mere tendency that is in need of ongoing development. Its philosophical "position" is never actually that—it is inherently unstable, in need of further articulation and development. Philosophical systematization is a process whose elements develop in stages of interactive feedback—its exfoliation is a matter of dialectic, if you will.

5. A RETROSPECT TO HERBART

A dialectical process of Hegelian proportions is at work throughout aporetic dialectics. According to Hegel, it is the essential character of human reason to involve itself in contradictions and conflicts of commitment that it first posits but then overcomes through an eventual reconciliation at a higher level. However, the philosopher who analyzed this aspect of the history of the subject most clearly was Johann Friedrich Herbart. He proposed that the history of philosophy should be recast in issue-oriented form and should in fact be written in terms of the development of doctrines devised to resolve successively encountered antinomies. The history of phi-

losophy, he held, should be written as a history of problems (and thus in a genre of which, even today, we have but a few fragmentary samples).

Herbart maintained that the fundamental concepts of thing/substance (as a unification of a plurality of different and distinct qualities is one single item) and of causality (as the production by one item or state of as yet another that is substantially different) are at bottom conceptually inconsistent in forcing discordant factors into a logically unwarrantable unity. And the same goes for the idea of a self as the unitary basis of diversified doings. Logic can only underwrite connections of necessity: contingent connections are beyond its rank—literally incoherent from a logic-conceptual standpoint. The endeavor of philosophical theorists to impose a neat logico-conceptual order on a fundamentally surd and contingent reality is bound to issue in aporetic disunity.

As Herbert saw it, the experientially grounded concepts in whose terms we represent and process our cognitive experiences in science and ordinary life always involve internal conflicts. An experiential concept *A* unites two disparate elements *M* and *N* that do not stand in a logico-conceptual union but are united by a strictly factual bond. There is a tension or contradiction here. We can neither (on theoretical grounds) maintain that there is, a fusion of *M* and *N* in *A*, nor yet (on factual grounds) can we deny this connection outright. Logic rejects the conceptual fusing of *M* and *N*. experience rejects their separation. All we can do is suppose that there is some new element, some distinction that splits *M* into M_1 and M_2 one of which is rigidly joined to *N*, the other strictly distinct from it. At best, then we can see *A* as an unstable compound, oscillating between A_1 (where M_1 is problematically conjoined with *N*) and A_2 (where M_2 is unproblematically disjoined from *N*). Accordingly, every experiential concept is the ground from which some suitable supplementary concept must emerge to yield a distinction capable of restoring consistency.

Herbart saw the prime task of philosophy as the reworking of our experiential concepts so as to restore consistency—to effect an integration that relegates these inner contradictions to the realm of mere appearance. Philosophy strives to overcome the internal inconsistency of our pre-systemic concepts. Throughout our philosophizing, those experiential concepts will inevitably come to be transcended by successors who seek to resolve the tensions of their pre-systemic predecessors. This process, Herbart's "method of relations" (*Methode der Beziehungen*), is the counterpart in his system of the Hegelian dialectic. As Wilhelm Dilthey put it:

> Herbart was the first who regressed analytically from the course of philosophical development to the particular problems that were the prime mover in the minds of individual thinkers. For him, philosophy was "the systematic study (*Wissenschaft*) of philosophical questions and problems." And so he responded to the question of the nature of philosophizing with the reply that it is "the endeavor to solve problems." In the first redaction of his *Introduction to Philosophy*, he places the motive force to philosophizing in the puzzles and contradictions regarding the nature of things. Our trying to put the pieces together, to see the world whole, occasions our initial discovery of philosophical problems.[6]

Herbart thus deserves to rank along with Hegel as a founder of the theory of aporetic dialectic in philosophy.

6. PHILOSOPHY IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT: RECOVERING THE HEGELIAN VISION OF PHILOSOPHY AT LARGE

The turn to plausibility opens up different ways of viewing philosophy-at-large and of organizing the history of philosophy on rational (or at least more perspicuous) principles.

To be sure, in looking to our own philosophy we are, of course, minded to see its various contentions as truths—and thereby see the rival alternatives as falsehoods and errors. But there is also a somewhat more generous prospect. For one has the option of regarding *the entire manifold of the contentions of philosophers*—ourselves included—*as so many (merely) plausible propositions*.

This of course involves a radical departure from the all too common way of looking at philosophy-at-large namely as a deeply flawed venture in the quest for truth—resulting in a mixed bag that conjoins some a small aggregate of truths (one's own views) along with a massive plurality of error (everyone else's). If our concept of cognitive systematization is confined to the classical, Aristotelian view, then there just is no possibility of systematizing philosophy-as-a-whole. But according to philosophical contentions the status of plausibilities we open up the prospect of systematizing philosophy at large and one single and unified—albeit vast—non-Aristotelian system of rational cognition.

An approach which see philosophical contentions as ("merely") plausible thus open up the prospect of regarding philosophy-at-large as a meaningful venture in rational cognition—one of constructing a non-Aristotelian system of *plausible* responses to the big questions comprised in the prob-

lem-agenda of the field. And in thus articulating a philosophical apory and elaborating the possibilities for its resolution, and then exfoliating the plausible save-what-you-can distinctions we are, in effect, spelling out some component sector of the large system constitution a non-Aristotelian systematization of philosophy-at-large.

In turning from truth to plausibility one realizes both gains and losses. The gains relate to amplitude of vision and breadth of perspective: a great many more things are plausible than are determinately true. The loss relates to reliability: a good deal of shaky stuff gets added in and there will be more dubious dross amid the reliable gold. Accordingly, in interpreting philosophy-at-large in the light of plausibility considerations one takes a distinctive and in some ways non-doctrinal line.

For while philosophy is often characterized as a quest for truth, this strategy realizes the prospect of an entirely different approach to information—one geared not to irrefragable truth but the fallible plausibility.

Such an approach represents a vision that has been on the stage in German philosophy since Christian Wolff[7] and prominent since Hegel. And it was in this frame of mind that the Bertrand Russell of the pre-World War I era wrote: "Philosophy is to be studied, not for the sake of any definite answers to its questions, since no definite answers can, as a rule, be known to be true, but rather for the sake of the questions themselves; because these questions enlarge our conception of what is possible, extend our intellectual imagination, and diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind against speculation."[8]

It must be emphasized, however, that in taking such a more inclusive and many sided view of the subject, we are in process of addressing philosophy-at-large, and not deriving our own philosophy. We survey, examine, and weigh the size of possible answers to the questions with their deciding which one to accept as correct. We are, in sum, looking at the matter from the standpoint of the community, not from that of ourselves in *propria persona*.

For, what we get in such a quasi-Hegelian perspective is not itself a system of philosophy—not a coherent and cohesive exposition of a philosophical position that offers specific answers to definite questions. Instead, what we get is a systematization of philosophizing-at-large, a comprehensive coordination of philosophizing in general. After all, a plausibility system, unlike a system of purported truth, does not provide *an answer* to any of the questions—or *a solution* to any of the problems. Instead it provides a plausibility of (incompatible) answers and a multitude of (different and dis-

tinct) solutions. It does not even pretend to offer the truth but only surveys of different and discordant *purported* truths emanating from different purporters. Philosophy as such cannot abandon the quest for credible truth regarding the solution of philosophical problems. Non-Hegelian plausibility syncretism does not even attempt to provide it.

Facing a plurality of contending rival answers to philosophical questions, the sceptic embargoes *all* of the available options and enjoins us to reject the whole lot as meaningless or otherwise untenable. A more radical option, though equally egalitarian, is to proceed in the exactly opposite way and view all the alternatives positively, embracing the whole lot of them. The guiding idea of this approach is that of *conjoining* the alternatives. Such a syncretism represents an attempt to "rise above the quarrel" of conflicting doctrines, refusing to "take sides" by taking all the sides at once. It is a Will Rogers kind of pluralism that never met a position it didn't like. Confronted by discordant possibilities, it embraces them all in a generous spirit of liberalism that sees them all as potentially meritorious. But of course what is now at issue is mere plausibility and not actual truth.

The discordant doctrines of philosophers are seen by syncretism as no more than individual contributions to a communal project whose mission is not a matter of *establishing a position* at all but one of *examining positions, of exploring the entire space of alternatives.* The key question is now not (as with the hermeneutic approach described above) the history-oriented "What positions *have been* taken?" but the possibility-oriented "What positions *can be* taken?" It is a matter of the comprehensive appreciation of possibilities in general and not one of trying to substantiate some one particular position as rationally appropriate. On this approach, the real task of philosophy is to inventory the possibilities for human understanding with respect to philosophical issues. In studying the issues we widen our sensibilities, enhance the range of our awareness, and enlarge the range of our cognitive experience. Philosophy now becomes a matter of horizon broadening rather than problem solving—a matter not of *knowledge* at all but of the sort of "wisdom" at issue in an open-endedly welcoming stance toward diverse positions. To take philosophy as *judging* its theses and theories—deeming these acceptable and those not—looks from this standpoint to be something of a corruption. Instead, philosophy is seen as essentially nonjudgmental, its task being to enlarge our views and extend our intellectual sympathies by keeping the entire range of possibilities before our mind.

But even without taking this line, it is clear that the benefit of a multilateral approach based on plausibility aporetics lies in its enabling us to see clearly

- how a particular position is related to its rivals;
- how our own system emerges from its antecedents;
- what price the position at issue required to pay and what benefits does it offer for doing things its way rather than in the way of alternatives.

The aporetic perspective thus conveys important lesson for philosophical hermeneutics. For it means that a philosophical position does not stand isolated: it is always one item in range of alternatives. And it is through comparing the comparative advantages and disadvantages of these alternatives that philosophical positions come to be substantiated.[9]

NOTES

1 The word derives from the Greek *απορία* on analogy with "harmony" or "melody" or indeed "analogy" itself.

2 To be sure, philosophers positioned in different experiential contexts will accomplish this differently because their judgments of priority are bound to differ.

3 The aporetic nature of philosophy and its implications are explored in detail in the author's *The Strife of Systems* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985). The book is also available in Spanish, Italian, and German translations.

4 This general position that philosophical problems involve antinomic situations from which there are only finitely many exits (which, in general, the historical course of philosophical development actually indicates) is foreshadowed in the deliberations of Wilhelm Dilthey. See his *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. VIII (Stuttgart and Göttingen: Teubner and Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961), p. 138.

5 Frank P. Ramsey, *The Foundations of Mathematics and Other Logical Essays*, ed. R. B. Braithwaite (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & co., 1931), pp. 115-16.

6 Wilhelm Dilthey. *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. VIII (Stuttgart, Teubner; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961). p. 134.

NOTES

7 For Christian Wolff, philosophy is *scientia possibilium, quatenus esse possunt* (*Philosophia Rationalis*, sect. 29).

8 Bertrand Russell, *Problems of Philosophy*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 249-50.

9 Issues relevant to this chapter are also discussed in the author's *The Strife of Systems* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985).

Chapter 10

THE INTERCONNECTIONS
The Systemic Interlinkage of Philosophical Issues

1. INTRODUCTION

In interpreting a philosophical text it is needful to assess its implications not just for the matters immediately at issue but for the larger picture as well. For it is inherent in the aporetic situation of philosophy that philosophical issues in areas that seem far removed from one another are in fact so closely interrelated that a position taken on the one has profound implications for positions one can or cannot take on the other. In philosophy details do not stand free—supported only by their own feet. Philosophical positions—even across widely separated domains—are interrelated in such a way that, however widely separated they may seem to be, there are nevertheless strong interactions between them. Accordingly, we can only avoid the systematist's concern for the interconnectedness of local issues only at the price of compromising the adequacy of the localist's concern for matters of detail.

2. EXAMPLE 1: EPISTEMOLOGY AND ETHICS

Suppose that we are sailing on the open seas in a vacation cruise ship. It is dusk and the visibility is beginning to be poor. We are strolling along the starboard side of the ship, when suddenly there is a shout: "Man overboard." Someone grabs a life preserver from the nearby bulkhead and rushes with it towards the side of the ship. Suddenly he comes to a stop and hesitates for a time. To our astonishment he turns, retraces his steps, and replaces the life preserver—calmly proceeding step by step as the region of the incident slips away, first out of reach, then out of sight. Puzzled and chagrined we turn to the individual and ask him why he broke off the rescue attempt. His response runs as follows: "Of course, throwing that life preserver was my first instinct, as my behavior clearly showed. But suddenly some ideas from my undergraduate epistemology courses came to

mind and convinced me that it made no sense to continue." Intrigued, we ask for more details. He responds as follows:

> What did we actually know? All we could see was that something that looked like a human head was bobbing out there in the water. But the visibility was poor. It could have been an old mop or a lady's wig stand. Those noises we took for distant shouts would well have been no more than a pulsing of the engines. There was simply no decisive evidence that it was actually a person out there. And then I remembered William Kingdon Clifford's dictum: "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence." So why act on a belief that there was actually a human being in danger out there, when the evidence for any such belief was clearly insufficient? And why carry out a rescue attempt when you do not accept that somebody needs rescuing?

Something has clearly gone wrong here. Even if we don't choose to fault our misguided shipmate as an epistemologist, we will incline to wonder about his moral competency.

Even if I unhesitatingly accept and endorse the principle that one must try to be helpful to others in situations of need, I am clearly in moral difficulty if I operate too stringent a standard of evidence in relevant contexts. For then I will be systematically precluded from doing things that, morally considered, I ought to do.

To operate in life with epistemological principles that impede one in the in the discharge of "normal" moral obligations is to invite justified reproach. Where the interests of others are potentially at risk, we cannot with moral appropriateness deploy evidential standards of acceptability of a higher, more demanding sort than those standardly operative in the community. At this point, epistemology has moral ramifications. For morality as we know it requires a relatively common-sense epistemology for its appropriate implementation. And so, in this regard, the stance we take in the one domain has significant repercussions for the way we must proceed in the other. The issues stand in systemic interlinkage.

3. EXAMPLE 2: SEMANTICS AND METAPHYSICS

Let us turn to another example of a very different sort. Consider the semantical position urged by an influential Oxford philosopher who asserts that there are no incognizable facts, maintaining that there indeed is a fact of the matter only when a claim to this effect is such that "we [humans]

could in a finite time bring ourselves into a position in which we were [fully] justified either in asserting or denying [the contention at issue]."[1] This sort of "finite decidability semantics" holds that a proposition is meaningful—qualifies as inherently true or false—only if the matter can actually be settled decisively and conclusively, one way or the other, by a finite effort in a limited time.

But this inherently not implausible view leads to some pretty strange destinations. For one thing, it requires us to abandon our common-sense view of the world about us. For as we standardly think about things within the conceptual framework of our fact-oriented thought and discourse, any real physical object has more facets than it will or indeed can ever actually manifest in experience. For every objective property of a real thing has consequences of a dispositional character and these are never actually surveyable in toto because the dispositions which particular concrete things inevitably have endow them with an infinitistic aspect that cannot be comprehended within experience. This desk, for example, has a limitless manifold of phenomenal features of the type: "having a certain appearance from a particular point of view". It is perfectly clear that most of these will never be actualized in experience. Moreover, a thing is what it does: entity and lawfulness are coordinated correlates—a good Kantian point. And this fact that things demand lawful comportment means that the finitude of experience precludes any prospect of the exhaustive manifestation of the descriptive facets of any real things.[2]

Physical things as we standardly conceive them not only have more properties than they ever will overtly manifest, but they have more than they can possibly ever can actually manifest because the dispositional properties of things always involve what might be characterized as mutually preemptive conditions of realization. The cube of sugar, for example, has the dispositional property of reacting in a particular way if subjected to a temperature of 10,000°C and of reacting in a certain way if emplaced for one hundred hours in a large, turbulent body of water. But if either of these conditions is ever realized, it will destroy the lump of sugar as a lump of sugar, and thus block the prospect of its ever bringing the other property to manifestation. The perfectly possible realization of various dispositions always fail to be mutually compossible, and so the dispositional properties of a thing cannot ever be manifested in toto—not just in practice, but in principle.

The existence of this latent (hidden, occult) sector of dispositional features is a crucial facet of our conception of a real thing. Our objective claims about real things always commit us to more than we can possibly

ever determine about them. To say of the apple that its only features are those it actually manifests is to run afoul of our conception of an apple. To deny—or even merely to refuse to be committed to the claim—that it would manifest particular features if certain conditions came about (for example, that it would have such-and-such a taste if eaten) is to be driven to withdrawing the claim that it is an apple. The process of corroborating the implicit contents of our objective factual claims about anything real is potentially endless, and such judgments are thus "non-terminating" in C. I. Lewis' sense.[3] This cognitive inexhaustibility of our objective factual claims inherent in the fact that their content will always outrun the content of any finite body of evidence for making them. Even G. E. Moore's paradigm of a claim of common sense realism, "this is a human hand", exemplifies this circumstance. For this assertion has an unending variety of factual consequences ("The hand will not turn into gold if shaken rapidly") that we can never actually control.

A real thing is always conceptualized as having experience-transcending features. All discourse about objective things involves an element of experience-transcending imputation—of commitment to claims that go beyond the experientially acquirable information, but yet claims whose rejection would mean our having to withdraw the thing-characterization at issue. To say of something that it is an apple or a stone or a tree is to become committed to claims about it that go beyond the data we have—and even beyond those which we can, in the nature of things, ever actually acquire. Any claim about the objective features of real things carries us beyond the limits of experience—actual experience certainly and very possibly possible experience as well.

A finite decidability semantics—though seemingly a merely linguistic doctrine about meaningful assertion—is accordingly not just a theory of language or logic. It has repercussions in very different domains. For example, it has far-reaching metaphysical consequences because it immediately precludes any prospect of a common sense realism. Any statement of objective fact—however modest and common sensical—is immediately rendered meaningless by the infinitude of its evidential ramifications. And so a semantical theory seemingly devised to serve the interests of a philosophy of language has implications that preempt a major substantive position in theoretical metaphysics.

Its conflict with common sense realism does not, of course, show that finite decidability semantics is wrong. But it does once again illustrate vividly the systemic interconnectedness of philosophical doctrines.

4. APORIES

It lies in the very nature of the discipline that in philosophy we often face aporetic situations in which various theses that individually have much to be said for them prove to be collectively incompatible.

Now, doing nothing is not a rationally viable option when we are confronted with such situations of aporetic inconsistency. Something has to give. Some one (at least) of those incompatible contentions at issue must be abandoned. Apories constitute situations of forced choice: an inconsistent family of theses confronts us with an unavoidable choice among alternative positions.

Consider, for example, the following apory:

1. All knowledge is based on observation. (Empiricism)

2. We can only observe matters of empirical fact.

3. From empirical facts we cannot infer values. (The fact-value divide)

4. Knowledge about values is possible. (Value cognitivism)

Give that (2) and (3) entail that value statements cannot be inferred from observations, we arrive via (1) at the denial of (4). Inconsistency is upon us. There are four ways out of this trap:

1-Rejection: There is also nonobservational—namely, intuitive or instinctive—knowledge: specifically of matters of value (value-intuitionism; moral-sense theories).

2-Rejection: Observation is not only sensory but also affective (sympathetic, empathetic). It thus can yield not only factual information but value information as well (value-sensibility theories).

3-Rejection: While we cannot deduce values from empirical facts, we can certainly infer them from the facts, by various sorts of plausible reasoning, such as “inference to the best explanation” (values-as-fact theories).

4-Rejection: Knowledge about values is impossible (positivism, value skepticism).

Such an analysis brings out a significant interrelationship that obtains in the theory of value between the issue of observation (as per (2)-rejection) and the issue of confirmation (as per (3)-rejection). It makes strange bedfellows.

Again, consider the apory:

1. A (cognitively) meaningful statement must be verifiable-in-principle.

2. Claims regarding what obtains in all times and places are not verifiable in principle.

3. Laws of nature characterize processes that obtain in all times and places.

4. Statements that formulate laws of nature are cognitively meaningful.

Four exits from inconsistency are available here:

1-Rejection: Maintain a purely semantical theory of meaning that decouples meaningfulness from epistemic considerations.

2-Rejection: Accept a latitudinarian theory of verification that countenances remote inductions as modes of verification.

3-Rejection: Adopt a view of laws that sees them as local regularities.

4-Rejection: Maintain a radical scepticism with respect to claims regarding laws of nature, one which sees all such law-claims as meaningless.

This apory locks four very different issues into mutual relevancy: (i) the theory-of-meaning doctrine that revolves about thesis (1), (ii) the metaphysical view regarding laws of nature at issue in thesis (2), (iii) a philosophy-of-science doctrine regarding the nature of natural laws as operative in thesis (3), and finally (iv) a language-oriented position regarding the meaningfulness of law claims. And the collision between these doctrines in the

apory at issue means that the stance that we take on some of these issues will block the position we can take on others—even though they seem to be, on first view, to lie in a different and remote domain.

5. INTERCONNECTEDNESS REEMPHASIZED

The various examples we have considered convey a clear lesson. Philosophical issues are inherently interconnected. And we all too easily risk losing sight of the interconnectedness of philosophical issues when we ride our hobby horses in the pursuit of the technicalities of a limited subdomain. The stance we take on questions in one domain have substantial implications and ramifications for very different issues in other, seemingly distant domains. We cannot emplace our philosophical convictions into conveniently separated compartments in the comfortable expectation that what we maintain in one area will have no unwelcome implications for what we are inclined to maintain in other domains. Because of their inherent interrelationships, philosophical positions generally form parts of such aporetic clusters, and we cannot resolve these apories without due concern for the systematic aspects of philosophical deliberation. A serious philosopher must be prepared to address the toilsome and not always welcome task of reevaluating one's favored solutions of the problems in the field of one's special interest in the light of their implications for other, seemingly remote domains.

The systemic interconnectedness of philosophical issues means that the price philosophers will pay for over-narrow specialization—for confining attention narrowly to one particular set of issues—is the potential incoherence of their overall positions.

Philosophizing is in this regard something akin to cognitive engineering. We have to keep all our commitments in reasonable balance overall. The sensible philosopher, like the sensible engineer, must proceed holistically, with a view to the overall implications of his particular resolutions. We would certainly laugh at the engineer who offered to build us a supersafe car—but one that will only go only two miles per hour. Surely, a similar derision is deserved by the sceptic who offers to build us a supersafe error—excluding epistemology that would not, however, allow us, say, ever to apply our moral principles to concrete cases or to maintain a line of distinction between science and pseudoscience.

An engineer who lets one particular desideratum (cost, safety, efficiency, or the like) function all-decisively to the exclusion of all else would

not produce a viable product but an absurdity. And this situation obtains in philosophy as well.

6. HERMENEUTIC IMPLICATIONS

These deliberations convey a clear lesson. To understand a philosophical contention or doctrine one has no alternative but to examine its wider ramifications across the larger terrain than what lies immediately to hand. Philosophy's doctrinal contentions always have a larger setting of interrelations defined by the nature of their aporetic environment and they cannot be properly grasped or explained until their wider implications are duly heeded. In interpreting philosophical deliberations one must always look beyond text to context.

NOTES

1 Michael Dummett, "Truth," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 59 (1956-59), p. 160. C. S. Peirce sometimes asserted a similar view.

2 This aspect of objectivity was justly stressed in the "Second Analogy" of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, though his discussion rests on ideas already contemplated by Leibniz, *Philosophische Schriften*, edited by C.I. Gerhardt, (Berlin: Weidmann, 1890), Vol. VII, pp. 319-22.

3 See C. I. Lewis, *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*, (LaSalle, Ill.: Carus, 1962), pp. 180-81.

Chapter 11

THE LAWS
The Rational Requisites of Interpretative Procedure

1. PRELIMINARIES

At the root of textual interpretation in philosophy there lie some rather straightforward factual questions. In specific, the prime issues in interpreting a philosophical text are five:

- What is the question the author is endeavoring to answer?
- What presuppositions does this question have?
- What is the answer that the author proposes to give?
- What are the alternative answers that might have been given? How does it stand in relation to its rivals in point of purport?
- What grounds are adduced to for thinking the proposed answer to be the correct one among the range of alternatives? How does it stand in point of relation to its rivals in point of merit?

The initial questions relate to more narrowly textual issues, the latter to contextual ones. Until these five basic questions are answered we have not as yet come to grips with what is actually going on in the text before us. Any really plausible interpretation of a text requires a good (defensible, substantiable) answer to these questions.

A hermeneutic approach that proceeds along these lines by putting questions at the forefront of its deliberations may be characterized as erotetic (from the Greek *eromai* = to ask). Such an analysis of philosophical texts not only characterizes philosophical hermeneutics but virtually de-

fines it. Behind the *laws of interpretation* (which are to be considered shortly) there accordingly lie certain basis principles that provide their underpinning and rationale. The first of these is

> *Principle of Interpretative Generosity*. In construing a text every practicable effort should be made to present it as offering plausible answers to reasonable questions.

Among the seemingly viable construals of a text and its project the best and most probable often should be seen as that one which *makes good informative sense* to the greatest extent that is realistically realizable in the circumstance.

The governing aim of interpretation is—or should be!—to extract the greatest amount of useful information from the text at issue. And this self-interested concern concurrently speaks loud and clear on behalf of interpretative generosity—for endeavoring to the greatest practicable extent to presuppose that in forming the text its author strives for both meaningfulness (for asserting what makes good sense) veracity (for asserting what is true) and informativeness (conveying significant material). Only by deploying such interpretative generosity in conceding the text the circumstantially best-realizable significance can we ourselves manage to draw maximal benefit from it.[1] The principle of interpretative generosity with its presumption of communicative optimality affords the most promising pathway of drawing cognitive benefit from the text. It is for this reason, a matter so much of in benevolence as of self-content.

Granted, in philosophy there is always a personal orientation at issue. But the issue is not really altogether autobiographical—is not just what was going on in the author's psyche when writing the text. Rather it is something more general, impersonal, universalistically rational. The real issue is: What could any reasonable person plausibly be taken to mean by saying the things that our author affirms? Text interpretation is not a psychological probing of a person's mind. It is—or should be—a well-conceived and scholarship-supported construction within the wider context of the authorship.

On this basis we arrive at a

> *Principle of Context-Normativity*: The better (the more smoothly and coherently) an interpretation fits a text into its wider context—at every cycle of contextuality—the better it is as an interpretation.

This principle constitutes a key comportment of the critically evaluative dimension of interpretation. Let us consider more closely its nature and its rationale.

First we must come to terms with the complexity of context. There are three distinguishable levels here:

- *Immediate*: Other parts of the same text;

- *Nearby or Proximate*: Other cognate discussions by the same author; other cognate discussions of the same genre or in the writings to which the author is responding by way of development or opposition;

- *Distant or Peripheral*: General aspects of the state of information and opinion of the time; general linguistic and philological considerations, etc.[2]

(The grammatical distinction of *this*/*that*/*yon*—the Spanish *éste*/*ése*/*aquél*—is helpfully suggestive here.)

Considerations at all these levels stand in the way of our equating the merits of all those different constructions and interpretations of a text by circumscribing the range of acceptable understandings that a text is able to bear. Text interpretation is clearly an evidential exercise where one has to make the best possible use of the relevant data over a wide range of information because a wide variety of hermeneutical factors must come into play:

1. What the text itself explicitly affirms

2. Other relevant discussions by the author bearing in the issues that the text addresses

3. Biographical evidence regarding the author's education, contacts, relevant interactions with contemporaries, and the like

4. Considerations of intellectual history regarding the state of knowledge and opinion in the author's place and time, and the cultural tradition in which the text originated

5. Philological data regarding the production-contemporaneous use of terms and expressions

Moreover, it must never be forgotten that texts are themselves are human artifacts produced along with innumerable other artifacts (buildings, utensils, etc.) by flesh-and-blood individuals—not as an idle game but in an effort to achieve certain determinate purposes. And so we come to yet another crucial hermeneutical factor, additional to the five listed above:

6. The setting of a nonverbal modus operandi within which texts take their place and play their purposive role.

The crucial point, then, is that at the level of its author and his setting it will transpire that any text has an envisioning historical and cultural *context* and that the context of a text itself is not necessarily simply textual—not something that can be played out solely and wholly in the textual domain. In the end we have to worry also about whether it makes sense to affirm the kind of thing a text says. This context of the texts that concern us constrain and delimit the viable interpretations that these texts are able to bear.

The crucial difference between *possible* interpretations and *plausible* interpretations comes into operation here. The process of interpreting philosophical texts accordingly goes through two stages and phases:

- an *ampliative* phase of alternative *proliferation*—of opening up new (plausible) interpretations—of seeking to survey a wider spectrum of plausible possibilities

- a *reductive* phase of alternative *evaluation*—of assessing the plausibility of the available interpretation so as to be able to angle out in as definite a way as possible a minimal range of comparatively very plausible alternatives

This line of thought leads to the consideration of certain lawful principles of reconstructive text interpretation, principles of text exegesis that obtain in general, but in any case hold for the interpretation of philosophical texts.

Thus while it is indeed true that every text interpretation is itself a text, some nevertheless have a better systemic fit than others. They harmonize

more smoothly and adequately both into the larger context of texts in general, and into the circumbient context of the extratextual realm of thought and action. And it is exactly here that we come to the crux of the issue of interpretative adequacy.

2. THE FIRST LAW

The crucial task of text interpretation is at bottom one of not merely *examining* possibilities but of *evaluating* them. As indicated above, one must go beyond the survey of *possible* interpretations to assess which of them are *plausible* and—going even beyond this—to endeavor to decide which (if any) among them is *optimal*. In implementing this project we may begin with the aforementioned principle of context normativity, which leads straightaway to:

> *The First Law of Text Interpretation: CONTEXTUAL COHERENCE.* The merit of text interpretations can properly and appropriately be assessed through contextual coherence, in line with the idea that that interpretation is optimal within the range of available alternatives which maximizes the extent to which it achieves systemic coherence within the setting of the larger context of other relevant texts and their factual stagesetting.

Taking account of context means making synoptic sense of the wider contextual scene and fitting our text into the result. It is a matter of *systematization*—of working for systemic assurance and coherence.

What is at issue with this sort of fit or coherence? Fundamentally the matter of plausibility assessment for interpretations is one of rational economy—of minimizing the expectation of intellectual effort. One set of claims or contentions fits better or coheres better with others if they can be coordinated with the least difficulty—if conjoining them causes the least number of problems and questions or, even better yet, removes questions, obscurities and uncertainties that would arise when looking at them in separation. The crux is the extent to which the interests of cognitive economy come to be served. The fundamental idea is that simpler is better and the operative maxim that of: *Complicationes non sunt multiplicandae praeter necessitatem* (Never make needless complications). The name of the interpretative game is the elimination or at any rate minimization of inconsistencies, discrepancies, obscurities, paradoxes, difficulties, anomalies, etc. The optimal interpretation is that which accomplishes its explanatory work overall with a minimum of cognitive friction.

Not only can a text have a *subtext* of merely implicit and inarticulated messages, but it also—and more usually—has a *supertext*—a wider contextual environment within which its own message must be construed. It is in fact coherence with the resources of context (in the widest sense of this term) that is at once the appropriate instrument of text interpretation and the impetus to objectivity in this domain.

The most sensible approach to the existence of a variety of alternative text interpretations is thus what might be called the *coherence theory* of interpretation. This theory is predicated on two main theses:

1. The ultimate object of the interpretative enterprise is *optimization*. Its goal is not just to survey possible interpretations but also to assess their respective merits and—above all—wherever possible to determine which one is the best.

2. The optimal interpretation of a text is what can best achieve a *systemic unification* of the whole range of the hermeneutical factors previously enumerated (context, author data, philology, intellectual history, and the rest). The determinative issue is that of the best overall fit, leaving the least overall residue of questions, problems, difficulties, loose ends, or the like.

Whatever can be said against a coherence theory of *truth*, a coherence theory of *interpretation* is eminently sensible. The fact that there are standards—that the situation we face in dealing with philosophical texts is not a matter of an unfetteredly imaginative, anything-given, free-wheeling word-spinning—brings rationality on the scene once more. Text interpretation is a practice that can be more or less adequate in the light of the ultimate good of *systematization*: of fitting texts into context in a way that realizes a holistically coherent account.

There is, to be sure, the question of who makes the rules of appropriateness. But here the answer is that they preexist as something not *made by* but rather *given to* us, not invented but rather something to be discovered by anyone who examines the range of relevant phenomena with sufficient care. They are implicit and inherent in the broader context revolving both about the text itself and the purposive tradition within which the interpretation proceeds. Interpreters no more make up the rules of the process in which they are engaged than speakers make up the meanings of the words

they use. (Both emerge from a tradition of human praxis and are not legislated from on high by a *deus ex machina*.)

3. THE SECOND LAW

The burden of deliberation has to this point been concerned to argue for two contentions:

- Text interpretations are not created equal: some are more plausible than others.

- The standard of interpretative plausibility is essentially coherentist in nature: plausibility is a matter of the smoothness of systemic fit into the texts wider *context*, broadly construed.

Now it is important to note how these considerations countervail against the fact that underdetermination generally afflicts the interpretation of texts—that all too often texts admit of a variety of divergent interpretations. We come here to the fundamental principle that we shall designate as:

> *The Second Law of Text Interpretation: COMPREHENSIVENESS* The larger we spread the net of context—the more inclusive and extensive our contextual focus of reference is designed to be—the secure our interpretation and the narrower the range of really plausible interpretational alternatives becomes. As an analysis of context increases in scope, the range of plausible alternatives is generally narrowed. In matters of textual interpretation, increases in information generally function so as to decrease underdetermination.

Given that the natural standard of interpretation merit is a matter of smoothness of fit within the setting of a text's larger context, this principle has the immediate corollary: Better interpretations will for this very reason stand coordinate with a narrower range of plausible alternatives. (And inversely: any interpretation that succeeds in narrowing the field of alternatives is ipso facto better.)

4. THE THIRD LAW

There is, however, another aspect to the matter. Those more sophisticated interpretations—those that are better because more elaborately at-

tuned to context (First Law) and which thereby engender the greater definiteness through decreased underdetermination (Second Law)—also grow internally more complex and elaborate. For we now also arrive at:

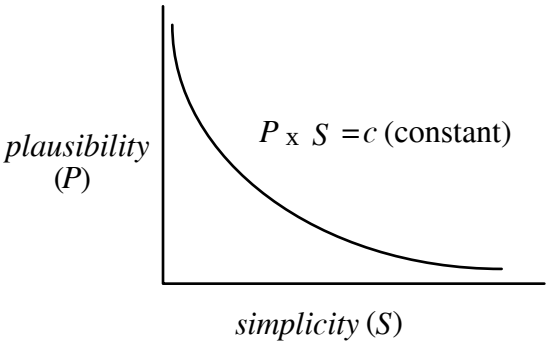
> *The Third Law of Text Interpretation: SOPHISTICATION*. The more substantial an interpretation—the more extensively attuned to the detail of their contexts and the more elaborate and internally ramified it becomes the stronger its claims to adequacy. Accordingly, it lies in the nature of things that better interpretations are generally more nuanced: they become more complicated through taking a greater manifold of contextual ramifications into account.

The point is that usually and ordinarily in the natural dialectic of scholarly hermeneutics, our interpretations grow more subtle, sophisticated, and complex.

We find here an illustration of a very general phenomenon in the theory of information. The relationship between the plausibility (*P*) and the simplicity (*S*) of an answer to a controversial question is generally characterized by an equation $P \times S$ = constant, as presented in the (somewhat metaphorical) diagram of Display 1. In cognitive problem solving greater plausibility generally requires greater complexity and cannot be achieved without it. Complexity is the price we pay for enhancing the plausibility of our interpretations. We want as much simplicity as we can get: that is simply a principle of rational economy. But in a difficult world we cannot achieve more adequate solutions to our problems—interpretative problems included—save at the price of increased complexity. In physics entropy takes us from more complex and differentiated states to simpler ones, but in interpretation the direction is reversed.

Display 1

THE CONFLICT OF DEFENSIBILITY AND SIMPLICITY



In any event, the three laws of interpretation we have surveyed indicate that—deconstructionism not withstanding—text interpretations are not all on the same level. When other things are anything like equal, one text interpretation is comparatively more meritorious to the context that it achieves greater:

- *contextuality* (i.e., coherence over the manifold of relevant contexts)
- *determinateness* (i.e., eliminative reduction of competing alternatives)
- *complexity* (i.e., internal ramification in the detail of the interpretative account itself)

5. THE FOURTH LAW

Another law of interpretation is also inherent in the situation of the Display 1 relationship. Ideally we would like to have our cake and eat it, too. We would like to have interpretations that are highly plausible (everywhere elegantly context fitting) and also very simple (utterly clear, lucid, compelling, elegant). But this consideration is generally unattainable. As the display also shows, we find ourselves in the unhappy situation that plausibility and simplicity are interrelated *competitively*. The salient requisites of

interpretative merit are competitive: we can increase merit in one respect only at the expense of decreasing it in another.[3]

This consideration brings us to:

> *The Fourth Law of Text Interpretation: IMPERFECTABILITY*. The interpretation of a problematic philosophical text can only be perfected up to a point. Plausibility can in general only be increased at the expense of additional complication—and thus inelegance.

This fourth law is akin to the information theoretic principle of noise or entropy. It is a principle of limitation stipulating that there is in general a limit to the extent (well short of perfection) to which we can realize interpretative adequacy—this being understood as calling for the optimal, best attainable combination and blending of plausibility/tenability and simplicity/elegance. Interpretation aims at light but also generally heat so that a kind of cognitive thermodynamics is at work here.

* * *

It should be noted that the rationale of these four laws lies rather straightforwardly in a fundamental principle of information theory. A simple example suffices to make the point. Consider the description sequence: dog/labrador retriever/black/male. The more qualifying conditions are introduced, the more amply and fully—and thus adequately—the item at issue is described in its full contextuality so that as it becomes more amply specified, the fewer things will answer to the description. And so the more complex the descriptive situation becomes—the more amply and elaborately it is drawn—the greater its delimitedness. And of course the actual phenomena we deal with cannot be perfected: something will always be left out (imperfectability): reality always has more features than we can manage to specify. In philosophy, as elsewhere, text interpretation is simply part and parcel of the larger issue of information processing and is subject to the same limits and limitations.

The crucial thing, however, is that the information at issue in text interpretation is being provided by someone different from the author himself. And in the case of philosophy, the interpretative project is a matter of seeking entry into the ideational designs of another mind. And where the mind is that of an insightful genius—a Plato or Aristotle or St. Thomas, say, or Leibniz or Kant or Hegel, then this sort of enterprise is not only challenging, but intensely interesting as well.

And so in the end we are brought face to face with a somewhat surprising fact. A*t the methodological level there is a salient structural analogy—or isomorphism—between doing philosophy and interpreting philosophical texts*. For in both cases alike, coherence and comprehensiveness are our guiding stars. In the one case, that of philosophizing, the standard of merit for philosophical theories pivots on their fit into the comprehensive systematization of "experience"—of our knowledge of the world mediated by the facts of everyday life and of science. And in the other case, that of text-interpretation, the standard of merit pivots on fitting the construction of those texts into a comprehensive systematization of the wider context to which these texts belong. It is as though philosophy were itself a matter of text interpretation when it is experience (in the widest sense) that writes the book with which we are concerned.[4]

NOTES

1 Of course the qualification "as the circumstance of the situation plausibly permits of" lays an absolutely crucial role here.

2 On the trichotomy at issue here see the essay "The Threefold Way" in the author's *Forbidden Knowledge* (Dordrecht-Boston-Tokyo: D. Reidel, 1987), pp. 83-92.

3 On the *desideratum influence* at issue here see the author's study of "Desideratum Complimentarity," Chapter 7 of *Studies in Value Theory* (Frankfurt: Ontos, 2006), pp. 93-109.

4 This chapter is a somewhat revised version of a paper originally published under the same title in the *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, vol. 72 (1999), pp. 117-29.

Chapter 12

THE PROSPECT
Philosophy at the Turn of the Century: A Return to Systems

1. THE 20TH CENTURY REJECTS THE HERITAGE OF THE 19TH

The characteristic style of 19th century philosophizing consisted in the articulation of ambitious systems of thought, whose leading ideas generally centered around a single, grandiose organizing principle. For while a "big picture" was being attempted, the position being expounded was nevertheless almost always one whose core could be represented epigrammatically by a compact and pithy but all-revealing slogan. In metaphysics, for instance, we find such examples as the idealism of Hegel and Fichte for which "Reality is the product of Reason (or of Mind)", the doctrine of Schopenhauer for which "Reality is the product of the interaction of Will and Idea", while the scientific materialism of Ernest Haeckel, or the dialectical materialism of Engels and Marx also represented positions that could be encapsulated in analogous epigrams. The style of approach is the same throughout. Every such metaphysical doctrine represented the development of a far-reaching theory above principle components pivoted on a single leading idea capable of a neat and compact articulation. And the generative impetus of the whole was itself provided by a unitized cardinal principle that could be sketched more or less adequately, in a single sentence—or paragraph at most. Systematization was the watchword, with everything tightly focused and compactly unified around the ideational core of some central ruling principle.

In 19th century ethics we find exactly the same phenomenon. Here we encounter a plethora of *summun bonum* positions such as the personalistic theory of the good as that which best fosters people's personal development, the hedonistic theory of the good as that which maximally facilitates human pleasure, the evolutionary theory of the good as that which conduces to the well-being of the species, and the like. And then in political philosophy we have such positions as the Hegelian doctrine that right action is that which optimally expresses the demands of the Zeitgeist, or the

utilitarian theory of right action as that which redounds to the greatest good of the greatest number. Here, once again, everything is pivotal upon and organized around a neat single predominating principle.

And so, quite in general, the style of 19th century philosophizing—not just in metaphysics and ethics but all across the board—was to endeavor to resolve far-reaching philosophical issues on the basis of a small centralized cluster of rather straightforward and compact principles. And at the end of the period, the turn-of-the-century philosophers still reflected this heritage, with versions of this centralizing style of philosophizing exemplified in the intuitionism of G. E. Moore, the neutral monism of Bertrand Russell, the vitalism of Henri Bergson, or the pragmatism of William James. The philosophies of this era were usually still devoted to in articulating various relatively compact central-principle theories which, nevertheless, were sufficiently ambitious to claim a capacity to "do it all".

However, this 19th-century vision of the philosophical enterprise received a harsh treatment at the hands of the 20th century. Here, as elsewhere, World War I provided a great ideological watershed. In producing a pervasive disillusionment with the aggrandizingly imperialistic political systems of the past, it also engendered a cultural attitude manifesting a comparable disdain for the centralizing philosophical systems of the past. The aftermath of the war thus saw unfolding in Europe and America a negatively, skeptical climate of thought that rejected the doctrines and dogmas of the pre-war era and dismissed with contempt the whole process of system building and systematization. The consensus view of this period insisted that the time when metaphysical deliberation is a viable enterprise is past, and that nothing meaningful and sensible can be said about such issues, so that silence is the best policy—just as the early Wittgenstein maintained. Alike with positivists, nihilists, phenomenologists, Hermeneuticists—the major new tendencies of philosophical thought of the post-World War I era all maintained that philosophical systematization of the traditional type must be abandoned, and something very different substituted in its place.

To be sure, distinctly diverse doctrinal tendencies came to the fore regarding the nature of this substitution. The logical positivists of the Vienna Circle school proposed to take a science-is-all line. As they saw it, the entire project of speculative philosophy—and metaphysics in particular—is a matter of fraud and delusion. Insofar as meaningful questions going beyond the formalities of logic and language are at issue, natural science can resolve them. A different approach was taken by cultural relativists, who

were inspired by the social rather than natural sciences. They relegated all philosophizing to the level of mere opinion and nailed their flag to the mast of psychology and sociology rather than physics and chemistry. Accordingly they rejected any idea of an objectively determinable fact of the matter regarding issues of the sort with which philosophy has traditionally dealt. It is all simply a question of what people happen to think. Again, adherents of the analytic school insisted that philosophy as traditionally conceived must be abandoned in favor of exegesis of the use of language. We should not—must not—investigate what such things as truth and justice and beauty inherently are and involve, but should instead examine how the expressions such as "truth", "justice", "beauty" are ordinarily used when such matters are discussed. And, rather similarly, the philosophically skeptical Martin Heidegger of his later period also insisted that metaphysical issues of the traditional sort cannot be addressed meaningfully. Instead we must, he held, focus our philosophical concerns on the prosaic matters of ordinary life and everyday affairs, and preserve a stance of relaxed and disdainful indifference (*Gelassenheit*) towards those fruitless speculation in which speculative philosophers have traditionally indulged.

In ethics and moral philosophy we find much the same situation. The ethicists of the analytical school wanted to abandon concern for the substantive issues of the domain in favor of a meta-ethical preoccupation with how language functions in discussing such matters. Other ethical theorists took a positivistically sociological line and sought to replace ethics with the study of people's attitudes regarding right and wrong conduct, substituting the study of mores for moral theory as such. Still others deemed it best to view ethics in terms of the rhetoric of promotion and persuasion. What is at issue, they maintained, is just a matter of recommending certain attitudes and actions on the basis of personal predilection. And so, while different thinkers thus took very different lines, nevertheless all these tendencies of the post-1920 generation agreed in rejecting substantive ethics with its traditional goal of providing a theoretical framework for right action—either altogether, or in favor of some less strongly normative, more experientially based observational/empirical endeavor that forswore any aspirations in the direction of a systematic theory of morality.

A definite over-all picture emerges from such a survey of the situation. The principal thinkers of the post-war period took a close look at 19th century epigrammatically systematic philosophy and decided they wanted no part of it. Instead, they proposed to reform our understanding of the world by shifting its basis from philosophically geared principles to factually ori-

ented disciplines—in natural science, in cultural studies, in language and logic, in everyday-life contexts, or whatever. All across the board, the most influential tendencies of thought of this era shared a common negativism towards classical systemic philosophizing. They regarded the world's factual arrangements (as portrayed in science or in ordinary life) as being final and self-sufficient without requiring—or even admitting of further philosophical grounding or substantiation.

2. THE SHIPWRECK OF INTER-BELLUM NEGATIVISM

This negativistically skeptical climate of thought dominant in intellectual circles after World War I was itself consumed in the flames of the great anti-totalitarian crusade that culminated in World War II. In the post-war reaction against the paroxysm of dictator-imposed horrors, people were no longer all that willing to abandon the quest for meaningful harmony with its absorption in normatively substantive concerns. Increasingly a consensus emerged that it was totally inappropriate to dismiss efforts to provide theoretical validation for the traditional normative distinctions such as true/false, right/wrong, and just/injust. The ethos of the new age was increasingly reluctant to cast such rationale-oriented justifactory projects up on the trash heap of outmoded styles of thinking. Questions of validation, justification, and evaluation began to emerge into prominence once more, and philosophers once again showed signs of nurturing systematic aspirations.

The fact is that many people were put off by the negativistic modes of anti-philosophy of the inter-bellum era and their positivistic or language-analytic expressions. After World War II, many among the best and the brightest of the younger generation simply turned away from academic philosophy altogether (especially in Britain, where professional philosophers stayed attached to inter-bellum negativism). Young people who were drawn to philosophical interests now often looked outside the Anglo-Saxon mainstream. Some turned to Eastern philosophies and others to the literally or sociologically or psychoanalytically inspired modes of cultural speculation that had increasingly become a substitute for philosophy in France. Still others turned to ideology, either religious (as with the Catholic theoreticians who hijacked the hermeneutical movement) the anti-religious (as with the ideologists who yielded to the siren call of an atheistical ideology inspired by such theorists as Nietzsche or Marx). However, many professional philosophers themselves also reacted against the current—not by

way of this sort of abandonment of the historical productions of the discipline, but rather by returning to the tradition and endeavoring to rehabilitate and reassert classical positions and perspectives. Increasingly, the post-war rejection of the negativism of the inter-war era led philosophers to look with deepening interest and sympathy to the positions of the past.

There was now a great revival of preoccupation with the philosophy of the traditional mainstream and a revulsion against both the dismissive attitudes of the logical positivists and the know-nothing approach of the ordinary language philosophers. This phenomenon occurred not only in metaphysics but also—and especially—in ethics and moral philosophy. Reacting against the unspeakable brutality of the Stalin and Hitler regimes—and particularly in the wake of catastrophic developments in the old French Indo-China—American philosophers in particular once again returned increasingly to substantive and normative issues. Thus old-line normatively prescriptive ethics made a noteworthy come-back, as people once again sought to establish formative guidelines as between good and bad, right and wrong. This phenomenon was especially manifest in the growth of "applied ethics"—the study of moral issues arising in professions such as medicine, business, or public service. Such issues as the protection of human life, people's rights and freedoms, the claims of future generations, and the like, began to be argued on old principles (contractarianism, natural rights, neo-Kantian deontology), duly fitted out with new wrinkles. And even in matters of science and mathematics, philosophers increasingly sought to achieve a systematic and holistically rationalized understanding of the processes involved. The stage was now set for philosophy to move once more in positive and constructive directions.

3. THE BURNED BRIDGES

Willingly or not, however, those concerned for the revival of the substantive philosophical aspirations at issue in the systems of an earlier era had to come to terms with the 20th century's cultural disinclinations towards those earlier perspectives. After all, it is never comfortable to occupy a home that was constructed with a view to conditions very different from those of one's own times and situation. Accordingly, any straightforward restoration was rendered impracticable by several major factors:

1. *The knowledge explosion* marked by a vast increase in the number of scholars and scientists, of books and journals, of students and teach-

ers, of laboratories and institutes, etc.—an expansion that swiftly brought entire new branches of science to the fore and vastly enlarged the framework of ideas with which philosophy had to contend.

2. *The proliferation of approaches* in the formal sciences. In mathematical analysis we nowadays have an intuitionism, finitism, "fuzzy arithmetic". In geometry we have the proliferation of non-Euclidean systems. In logic we have a whole gamut of non-stretched systems. In computation theory we have a whole line of moral approaches. The formal sciences are no longer monolithic wholes, but have come to encompass a vast profusion of alternatives.

3. *The diffusion of complexity* in the wake of the rise of the new physics with its drastic revision of our picture of the universe, its dematerialization of matters in subatomic physics, its complexification of causality in quantum physics, the emergence of scientific cosmology, the rise of neo-Darwinism evolutionary theorizing, the development of scientific physiological psychology, the emergence of artificial intelligence, etc.

4. *The realization of cognitive finitude* engendered by forced recognition that our knowledge cannot plumbs the ultimate depth of things. We have to reckon with limits and limitations. Our mathematical systems cannot encompass the whole of arithmetic (Gödel). Our languages cannot encompass the whole of truth (Tarski). Our particle accelerators cannot push particles to the speed of light, nor can our cooling apparatus attain absolute zero.

As regards the explosion of knowledge, consider just one illustration: the emergence of a heretofore undreamt of complexity of knowledge reflected in the process of taxonomic proliferation. In the 11th (1911) edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, physics is described as a discipline composed of 9 constituent branches (e.g. "Acoustics" or "Electricity and Magnetism") which were themselves partitioned into 20 further specialties (e.g., "Thermo-electricity" or "Celestial Mechanics"). The 15th (1974) version of the *Britannica* divides physics into 12 branches whose subfields are—seemingly—too numerous for comprehensive listing. (However the 14th 1960's edition carried a special article entitled "Physics, Articles on"

which surveyed more than 130 special topics in the field.) When the U.S. National Science Foundation launched its inventory of physical specialties with the National Register of Scientific and Technical Personnel in 1954, it divided physics into 12 areas with 90 specialties. By 1970 these figures had increased to 16 and 210, respectively. Substantially the same story can be told for every field of science. The springing up of new disciplines, branches, and specialties is manifest everywhere. And as though to counteract this tendency and maintain unity, one finds an ongoing evolution of interdisciplinary syntheses—physical chemistry, astrophysics, biochemistry, etc. The very attempt to reduce fragmentation produces new fragments.

Herbert Spencer argued long ago that evolution is characterized by von Baer's law of development "from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous" and manifests and ever-increasing differentiated "definiteness" and complexity of articulation. This may or may not be correct for *biological* evolution, but it assuredly holds for *cognitive* evolution. As the 20th Century unfolded, the increasingly clear realization of the complexity of the task of knowledge extension and the finitude of our means for its achievement has created a new sensibility that stresses the acknowledgment of limits. And this sensibility has rendered it impossible to return to the comparatively simple certainties of the old-style monolithic philosophical systems.

All this has meant that philosophy's traditional concern a systemic understanding able to elucidate "what it all means" faced a new cognitive scene of amazing scope and complexity. And so, those not prepared simply to abandon philosophy in favor of something altogether different were now impelled towards a new philosophical style—a new mode of philosophizing. The ruling idea of the time was that of the dictum "Something positive, yes—but nothing that smacks of those grandiose but oversimple systems of our grandfather's day." And in the circumstances such an altitude was only natural. After all, how can philosophy possibly stay simple in an awesomely complex world? How can our philosophical view of the world remain between the covers of a single book when our libraries are bursting beyond their four walls?

4. THE RISE OF PARTICULARISM

In addressing the increasingly manifest complexity of the real world—and thus also of the world of learning—the philosophical style that increasingly came into vogue in the 20th century may, for want of a better name, be characterized as *particularism*. Its salient features were as follows:

1. *Specificity tropism*: Adopting a case-study methodology by addressing concrete cases and specific situations. Turning away from general theories and broader speculations to examine particular small-scale issues.

2. *Preoccupation with discourse*: Concern for linguistic micro-detail regarding the use of particular words and expressions; the interpretation of particular sentences; nature of particular arguments and lines of reasoning.

3. *Preoccupation with matters of detail*: Dealing with concrete matters of minute detail, with questions so small-scale—and thereby so remote from the classical "big question" of philosophy—as to have the aspect of virtually legalistic quibbles.

4. *Concern for technique and the triumph of the technical*. Preoccupation with those aspects of the issues that can be addressed by means of the machinery of logical and linguistic analysis.

5. *Possibility mongering*. Preoccupation with hypothetical cases and situations. Concern not just with the reality of things but with virtual reality as well.

Philosophical inquiry now added a new-style disaggregation and proceeded to deal with questions of local rather than general issues, focusing in a micro-explanatory fashion on highly detailed questions in such contexts as:

- to explicate the meaning of philosophical concepts by means of "truth" conditions of language usage,

- to explain human capacities (e.g. for knowledge or for understanding) in terms of models or analogies from computing machines and "artificial intelligence" considerations,

- to explain human rule-following practices in terms of social policies and norms,

- to explain human capacities (e.g. for knowledge or for understanding) on the basis of evolutionary theories and Darwinian natural selection.

In the wake of proliferating details, specialization and technicalization has increasingly come to the fore.

In the Anglo-American context above all, the post-war generation of 1945-75 saw a new emphasis on the development and deployment of formal techniques of analysis suitable for elucidating not large-scale, global issues but rather for minor issues of small-scale, localized detail. Concern for small-scale micro-issues examined with the powerful magnification of new tools of logical and linguistic analysis—was now the order of the day. The writings of such major mid-century English-language philosophers as John Austin in Britain or Nelson Goodman in the U.S.—and even Ludwig Wittgenstein, a figure of an earlier time whose influence only then became prominent—were of such nature as to seem to the uninitiated as little more than an aggregation of logic-chopping quibbles and nit-picks.

The turning of philosophy from globally general, large-scale issues to more narrowly focused investigations of matters of microscopically fine-grained detail now became a strikingly notable phenomenon. In particular, the past three decades have seen a great proliferation of narrowly focused philosophical investigations of particular issues in areas such as economic justice, social welfare, ecology, abortion, population policy, military defense, and so on. In this context, the rapid growth of "applied philosophy"—that is, philosophical reflection about detailed issues in science, law, business, social affairs, information management, problem solving by computers, and the like—is an especially striking structural feature of the contemporary North American scene.

And philosophical investigations now made increasingly extensive use of the formal machinery of semantics, modal logic, computation theory, learning theory, etc. Ever heavier theoretical armaments were painstakingly developed and brought to bear on ever smaller problem-targets—to such an extent that sometimes lead readers of the professional literature came to wonder whether the important principle that technicalities should never be multiplied beyond necessity had been lost sight of.

Moreover, agenda-enlargement is yet another of the notable features of the period. The pages of its journals and the programs of its meetings bristle with discussions of issues that would seem bizarre to their predecessors of earlier days and to present-day philosophers of other places. For example, the overall program of the annual meeting of the Eastern Division of American Philosophical Association in December of 1991 included papers on "Is it Dangerous to Demystify Human Rights?", "Difference and the Differend in Derrida and Lyotard", "Animal Rights Theory and the Dimin-

ishment of Infants", "On the Ecological Consequences of Alphabetical Literacy", "Is Polygamy Good Feminism?", "The Ethics of the Free Market", "Planetary Projection of the Multiple Self on Films", "The Moral Collapse of the University", and "The Construction of Female Political Identity."[1] Entire professional societies are dedicated to the pursuit of issues now deemed philosophical that no-one would have dreamt of considering so a generation ago. (Some examples are the societies for Machines and Mentality, for Informal Logic and Critical Thinking, for the Study of Ethics and Animals, for Philosophy and Literature, for Analytical Feminism, and for Philosophy of Sex and Love.) A vast part of the discussions of the present-day professional conferences and the current literature of the field would have struck our philosophical predecessors of 50 years ago as dealing with matters outside the boundaries of the subject.

In this context, the rapid growth of "applied philosophy"—that is, philosophical reflection about detailed issues in science, law, business, social affairs, information management, problem solving by computers, and the like—is an especially striking structural feature of contemporary philosophy. In particular, the past three decades have seen a great proliferation of narrowly focused philosophical investigations of particular issues in areas such as economic justice, social welfare, ecology, abortion, population policy, military defense, and so on. The turning of philosophy from globally general, large-scale issues to more narrowly focused investigations of matters of microscopically fine-grained detail became an especially striking feature of American philosophy after World War II.

This agenda enlargement made for a revolution in the structure of philosophy itself by way of taxonomic complexification. The recent period accordingly saw philosophical study and writing proliferate enormously in the wake of a vast expansion of the American system of higher education after World War II. (There are currently in excess of 10,000 professional philosophical academies in North America.) Specialization and division of labor now began to run rampant, and cottage industries became the order of the day. The situation has grown so complex and diversified that one comprehensive recent English-language encyclopedia of philosophy[2] cautiously abstains from providing any taxonomy of philosophy whatsoever. (This phenomenon also goes a long way towards explaining why virtually no accounts of the subject in its present configuration exist.)

In consequence of these developments, philosophy—which ought by its historic mission and tradition to seek an integration of knowledge—has itself become increasingly disintegrated. No single thinker can any longer

command the whole range of knowledge and interests that characterizes present-day concerns of philosophy. After World War II it became literally impossible for philosophers to keep up with what their colleagues were writing. For there can be no doubt that the growing technicalization of philosophy has been achieved at the expense of its wider accessibility—and indeed even to its accessibility to members of the profession. No single thinker commands the whole range of knowledge and interests that characterizes present-day philosophy. The field has outgrown the capacity not only of its practitioners but even of its training institutions: no single university department is so large as to have on its faculty specialists in every currently active branch of the subject.

5. A VISION OF WHOLENESS

However, this preoccupation with particularistic detail came to leave many thoughtful people deeply dissatisfied with its resulting fragmentation and dissonance. And so there come to the fore once again philosophers who cared for the big picture and yearned for a vision of wholeness.

Like fashions in clothing or hair styling, intellectual fashions also come and go. They run their course and are replaced by something else, something theretofore unexpected because substantially opposed to the prevailing order of things. The Law of the Swinging Pendulum also obtains with regard to particular emphases and tendencies in intellectual culture: a movement towards one extreme comes to be succeeded by one that moves towards the opposite extreme, with action in one direction succeeded by a reaction in the other. And often as not the reaction is an overreaction. All this holds not just in matters of style, politics, and the like, but for philosophical movements as well. And so by way of reaction against the post-war generation's concern for discrete, local, and, as it were, technical issues, their successors came to yearn for a restoration of the Leibnizian (or Hegelian) vision of a philosophy that is synthetic, systemic, synoptic—in sum, one that provides for larger vistas.

To be sure, the urge towards seeing things whole has never been totally lost in philosophy. However unpopular it may be for a time, the lure of the idea of system has never disappeared altogether from the scene. It stretches through the history of modern philosophy from Leibniz to Hegel, Lotze, Peirce, cropping up even in the hostile environment of the 20th Century via such then rather unfashionable philosophers as Ernest Cassirer and A. N. Whitehead. But as inter-bellum negativism receded ever further into the

historical past, philosophers of the younger generation increasingly came to look with favor and fondness on the project of systematization. So many trees were growing that people came to insist once more in having a look at the forest. The yearning for coordinative syntheses, and unifying integrations—for an approach that is holistic rather than particularistic—began to make something of a comeback as the 20th century approached its end.

6. THE NEW ORDER: A REVIVAL OF SYSTEMATIC PHILOSOPHY

And so, the lure of the idea of system has once again come to the fore. But the task facing the project of philosophical systematization in the *fin de siècle* era was something distinctly new and different. The old-style reliance on monolithic central principles has become untenable, there being no real possibility of return to the simplistic systematizations of the beginning of the present century. Those neat "25 words or less" definitions and central-principle formulations beloved by writers of handbooks and textbooks are no longer seen as viable. The era of formulaic philosophy has had to be consigned safely to the unrecoverable past. The context within which present-day philosophizing must proceed exhibits characteristic features that separate it from the styles of systematization that characterized 19th century philosophizing. Slogans on the order of "Truth is correspondence with reality", "Justice consists of acting so as to make for the greatest good of the greatest number", or "Knowledge is true justified belief" have come to be deemed unable to accommodate the presently acknowledged complexities of the relevant issues. What has emerged, clearly and for all to see, is a new mode of complex systematization suited to an era of complexity. ("Complex systems for a complex age" would now seem to be the methodological watchword.)

And so, while the current style of philosophizing is involved in a return to systematic concerns, it has been a return with a difference. Its origins in an era of particularism has imbued present-day philosophizing with a care for detail—a concern to address concretely realistic issues by detailed elucidation and close argumentation. It still seeks to combine the care for minute analysis and concrete case studies. But it no longer sees the results as ends in themselves but rather as building blocks for those larger-scale systematization at which it aims. Care for the big picture across the details has returned to philosophy. "Meaningful detail, meaningfully integrated" in yet another guiding watchword of the new-style philosophy.

As the 21st century begins, the evolution of this new complex-system style of philosophizing is already well under way. But it is easily overlooked. For the history of philosophy has long accustomed us to a "great thinker" perspective, and on this basis one has become accustomed to seek for innovations only in the writing of some great innovator or other. But is the present case, the situation is such that we are going to have to be dealing with diffused and disaggregated movements or schools of thought rather than stellar individuals. The new-found prominence of microscopic detail has brought forth through the usual processes of specialization and division of labor, a vast host of detail workers. And so system-development has come to take the form of a multilateral and as it were collaborative project.

For the complexity that confronts us throughout the realm of inquiry means that the present situation of philosophy is such that satisfying systems can no longer emerge from single minds like Athena from the head of Zeus. Philosophy has had to come to terms with the fact that the problem situation with which it must nowadays grapple has grown in extent and complexity to the point where adequate systematization lies beyond the power of any individual intellect. And so the order of the day is disaggregated collaboration through the development of schools and circles. Philosophers once again produce complex systems. But they do so multilaterally and collectively, by way of a disaggregated and unplanned collaboration.

Holistic thinking has become one of the leitmotivs of late 20th century thought on a wide range of topics. One finds it in medicine, in thought about environmentalism, conservation, and species protection, and in urban planning and renewal, and in various other domains. And as the present deliberations indicate, it has a presence in philosophizing as well.

What we have nowadays in philosophy is a matter of the unprogrammed and disaggregated collaboration of diffused movements and schools of thought—not roadways constructed by a single engineer but paths created by the footsteps of many people, each crossing the terrain at issue their own individual errand. The format of present-day philosophizing thus has its own, new and distinctively characteristically multilateral configuration—an uncoordinated programmatic unity superimposed spontaneously on a division of labor in matters of detail.

Moreover, the task of complexity management calls for new modes of exposition—and new modes of teaching and learning to follow in its wake. One salient sign of this is the demise of the single-author expository text-

book or handbook for teaching purposes. Single authored texts and treatises can no longer adequately encompass the inherent many-sidedness of present-day philosophizing. What we have seen in their place is the emergence of exposition by anthology. Or, often as not, philosophy teachers nowadays simply create a do-it-yourself anthology via reading lists. Had the copying machine not already sprung into existence, people would have become driven to invent it. And the internet is only now beginning to make its potentially enormous impact in philosophical instruction. All of these innovations, organizational and technical combined, have carried philosophical systematization into a new and different era.

7. THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

Then, too, the new concern for combining a holistic approach with a particularistic care for detail has led philosophy—or, rather, philosophizing—to develop in a new direction. And it is instructive to take a closer look at the contemporary situation of the field as it emerges in the light of these considerations. For there can be no question that the development of the new style of micro-systematizing philosophizing has wrought a substantial sea-change in the nature of the enterprise.

Once upon a time, the philosophical stage was dominated by a small handful of greats and the philosophy of the day was what they produced. Consider German philosophy in the 19th century, for example. Here the philosophical scene, like the country itself, was a disjointed aggregate of principalities—presided over by such ruling figures as Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Schelling, Schopenhauer, and a score of other philosophical princelings. But in the present day, this "heroic age" of philosophy is a thing of the past.

The extent to which significant, important, and influential work is currently produced by academics outside the high-visibility limelight has not been sufficiently recognized. For better of for worse, in the late 20th century we have entered into a new philosophical era where what counts is not just a dominant elite but a vast host of lesser mortals. Great kingdoms are thus notable by their absence, and the scene is more like that of medieval Europe—a collection of small territories ruled by counts palatine and prince bishops. Scattered here and there in separated castles, a prominent individual philosophical knight gains a local following of loyal vassals or dedicated enemies. But no one among the academic philosophers of today manages to impose their agenda on more than a small fraction of the larger,

internally diversified community. Given that well over ten thousand academic philosophers are at work in North America alone, even the most influential of contemporary American philosophers is simply yet another—somewhat larger—fish in a very populous sea. If two or three percent of professional colleagues pay attention to a philosopher's work, this individual is fortunate indeed.

The fact is that those bigger fish do not typify what the sea as a whole has to offer. They are certainly not the only contributions to the literature of the field. Be it for reasons of careerism ("Publish or perish") or of authentic dedication, almost all of those numerous philosophers make some contribution to the literature of the field—mostly by way of journal contributions but frequently by way of books. (North America currently has over 150 philosophy journals.)

Consider, then, the situation in the U.S.A. Matters of philosophical history aside, some of the salient themes and issues with which American philosophers are grappling at the present time are

- logic in its non-classical dimension (modal, many-valued, "fuzzy", "paraconsistent", etc.);
- truth and meaning in mathematics and formalized languages;
- computer issues: artificial intelligence, "can machines think?", the epistemology of information processing;
- the nature of physical reality in the light of modern physics (relativity, quantum theory, cosmology, etc.);
- rationality and its ramifications in practical and theoretical contexts;
- social implications of medical technology (abortion, euthanasia, right to life, medical research issues, informed consent);
- feminist issues in ethics, social polity, science, etc.;
- social and economic justice, distributive policies, equality of opportunity, human rights;

- applied ethics: ethical issues in the profession (medicine, business, law, etc.);

- the merits and demerits of scepticism and relativism regarding knowledge and morality;

- the nature of personhood and the rights and obligations of persons.

None of these issues were put on the problem-agenda of present concern by any one particular philosopher. None arose out of a reactive preoccupation with the fundamental concerns of some particular influential philosophical writer. None arose out of one specific philosophical text or discussion. Instead, they blossomed forth like the leaves of a tree in springtime, sprouting forth conveniently in scattered places under the formative impetus of the Zeitgeist of societal concern. And this holds also for the flourishing use of the case-study method in philosophy, a notable phenomenon for which no one philosopher can claim credit. (To a contemporary observer it seems like the pervasively spontaneous expression of the ethos of the age.) The nature of American philosophy today is such that for the most part new themes, ideas, and tendencies have come to prominence not because of the influential impact of some specific philosopher but because of the disaggregated individual efforts of a host of writers. Philosophical innovation today is generally not the work of pace-setting individuals but a genuinely collective effort that is best characterized in statistical terms.

A century ago, the historian Henry Adams lamented the end of the predominance of an elite oligarchy of the great and the good in American politics—as it had been in the days of the Founding Fathers. He regretted the emergence of a new order based on the dominance of masses and their often self-appointed and generally plebeian representatives. Control of the political affairs of the nation had slipped from the hands of a cultural elite into that of the unimposing, albeit vociferous representatives of ordinary people. In short, democracy was setting in. Exactly this same transformation from the preeminence of great figures to the predominance of mass movements is now, one hundred years on, the established situation in even so intellectual an enterprise as philosophy.[3] In its present configuration, American philosophy reflects that "revolt of the masses" that Ortega y Gasset deemed characteristic of our era. This phenomenon manifests itself not only in politics and social affairs, but even in intellectual culture, including philosophy, where Ortega himself actually did not expect it.[4] For

what our century's spread of affluence and education has done through its expansion of cultural literacy is to broaden the social base of creative intellectual efforts beyond the imaginings of any earlier time. A cynic might perhaps characterize the current situation as a victory of the troglodytes over the giants.[5] In the Anglo-Saxon world at any rate—cultural innovation in philosophy as elsewhere is a matter of trends and fashions set by substantial constituencies that go their own way without seeking the guidance of agenda-controlling individuals. This results in a state of affairs that calls for description on a statistical rather than biographical basis. (It is ironic to see the partisans of political correctness in academia condemning philosophy as an elitist discipline at the very moment when professional philosophy itself has abandoned elitism and succeeded in making itself over in a populist reconstruction. American philosophy has now well and truly left "the genteel tradition" behind.)

Insofar as such a perspective is valid, some far-reaching implications follow for the eventual historiography of present-day philosophy. For it indicates a situation with which no historian of philosophy has as yet come to terms. In the "heroic" era of the past, the historian of the philosophy of a place and time could safely concentrate upon the *dominant* figures and expect thereby to achieve a certain completeness with respect to "what really mattered". But such an approach is wholly unsuited to the conditions of the present era. Those once all-important "dominant figures" have lost control of the agenda. To accommodate the prevailing realities, the story of contemporary philosophy must be presented in a much more aggregated and statistically articulated format. And insofar as single individuals are dealt with as such, it must be done against such an enlarged background, for they now function as *representative* rather than as *determinative* figures, with the status of the individual philosopher selected for historical consideration generally downgraded into a merely exemplary (illustrative) instance of a larger trend. The historian of philosophy in its present-day configuration accordingly faces a task of selection entirely different in nature and scope from that which prevailed heretofore. The role of the individual in the historiography of the future will be as the subject of a footnote illustrative of the diffused and diversified general trends and tendencies of thought to which the main body of the text will have to be dedicated.

Overall, then, philosophy at the end of the century wears a different and distinctive look. It is once more traditionalistic in orientation and systematic in its interests and aspirations—concerned to examine the classical big questions of traditional philosophy in a detailed, comprehensive, and sys-

tematic manner. But it is no longer an intellectual enterprise of the "great thinker, great system" type familiar from the earlier tradition. Systems are nowadays constructed rather like ant-hills than like pyramids that are the product of centralized direction. Unprogrammed and disaggregated collaboration among many workers distributively addressing large and complex projects has become the order of the day. And in every area of philosophy a literature of vast scope and complexity has emerged whose mastery is beyond the capacity of single individuals. Systematization is at work, but rather at the collective level than at that of individual contributions.[6] The programmatic format of present-day philosophizing is actually an uncoordinated unity spontaneously superimposed on a division of labor in matters of detail. What we have nowadays in philosophy is a matter of the unplanned and disaggregated collaboration of movements and schools of thought—not roadways constructed by a single engineer but paths created by many people, each crossing the terrain at issue on its own individual errands. Philosophizing at the end of the century thus has a new form—one which (like the science of the present) calls for collaborative teamwork, albeit of disaggregated and unorganized sort (unlike the science of the day[7]

And this is not necessarily a bad thing. After all, where is it written that philosophical systems must be compact and their production must come from the selected few—that they cannot be many-facedly complex and take the form of a complex, collective and collaborative intellectual, cultural, and scientific projects and positions?

Philosophy cannot stand still, seeing that what it must provide in the end is a cognitive accommodation of experience. For in the course of time the entire network of contexts within which human experience unfolds—alike cognitive, scientific, social, technical, or political—is all subject to change. And here, as elsewhere, new circumstances will call for new responses.

What is the philosophy of the 21st century going to be like? A famous jazz musician was once asked "Where is jazz going?" He replied, "If I knew that, we'd be there already." But while it is indeed effectively impossible to say what those philosophers of the future will produce, it is possible to make a plausible conjecture about how they will produce it. They are likely for some time to proceed in much the same way as at present—by the same sort of disaggregated collaboration that we are currently witnessing.

Yet one thing seems sure. The dream of systemic understanding and holistic cognition is something that philosophers are unlikely ever to abandon

altogether. To be sure, it is unlikely in the extreme that there will soon be a restoration of the ambitious single-author systematizations the have characterized philosophical productivity in the past. Nevertheless the development of systems is nowadays once more a living venture in philosophy. But it has become multilateral and diffuse—no longer the product of single minds. Present-day philosophy systematizers can no longer manage on their own—any more than contemporary experimental scientists can. The systems to which they aspire may be akin to those of the earlier tradition, but the means of their construction must be configured differently. For those aspiring systematizers of the present era have to depend on effort—or even mere chance—to provide them with collaborators among their colleagues. In this regard, we simply "can't go home again".[8]

And the implications of this reality for philosophical hermeneutics are profound and ramified. Texts have to be construed against the background of their originating conditions. And the context in which present-day philosophical texts have to be studied and interpreted is something quite different from what is was in days of yore. A *Leitmotiv* of ongoingly connected relevancy links philosophical discussions across the ages. But as with the rivers of Heracleitus, new waters are ever streaming in.

NOTES

1 *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, vol 65, no. 2 (October, 1991), pp. 13-41.

2 *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Paul Edwards (London and New York: Macmillan, 1967).

3 Not that a sizable percentage of people-at-large takes any interest in philosophy. In this context the democratization of the field is something quite different from its popularization.

4 "Philosophy needs no protection, no attention, no sympathy, no interest in the part of the masses. Its perfect uselessness protects it." (*The Revolt of the Masses* [*La rebelión de las masas*], tr. by Anthony Kerrigan [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989], p. 73. This classic work originally appeared in Madrid in 1929.)

5 The General Editor of a first-rate survey of American humanistic scholarship wrote in the foreword to the volume on philosophy: "Not many of the names mentioned in these pages are recognizable as those of great intellectual leaders, and many are unknown even to an old academic hand like myself who has a fair speaking ac-

quaintance with the various humanistic disciplines in America." (Richard Schlatter in Roderick Chisholm et. al., *Philosophy: Princeton Studies of Humanistic Scholarship in America* (*op. cit.*), p. x.)

6 In the long run, the technology of the internet will doubtless intensify this tendency.

7 In philosophy, unlike physics or chemistry, the multi-author paper is effectively unknown.

8 This chapter is a somewhat revised version of a German article entitled "Philosophie am Ende des Jahrhunderts," *Deutsche Zeitschift für Philosophie*, vol. 5 (1995), pp. 775-87.

ontos verlag PhilosophischeAnalyse
PhilosophicalAnalysis

1 Herbert Hochberg
Russell, Moore and Wittgenstein
The Revival of Realism
ISBN 3-937202-00-5
334 pp., Hardcover € 94,00

2 Heinrich Ganthaler
Das Recht auf Leben in der Medizin
Eine moralphilosophische Untersuchung
ISBN 3-937202-01-3
167 pp., Hardcover € 58,00

3 Ludger Jansen
Tun und Können
Ein systematischer Kommentar zu Aristoteles' Theorie der Vermögen im neunten Buch der „Metaphysik"
ISBN 3-937202-02-1
302 pp., Hardcover € 70,00

4 Manuel Bremer
Der Sinn des Lebens
Ein Beitrag zur Analytischen Religionsphilosophie
ISBN 3-937202-03-X
134 pp., Hardcover € 58,00

5 Georg Peter
Analytische Ästhetik
Eine Untersuchung zu Nelson Goodman und zur literarischen Parodie
ISBN 3-937202-04-8, 332 pp.
Hardcover € 94,00

6 Wolfram Hinzen / Hans Rott
Belief and Meaning
Essays at the Interface
ISBN 3-937202-05-6
250 pp., Hardcover € 58,00

7 Hans Günther Ruß
Empirisches Wissen und Moralkonstruktion
Eine Untersuchung zur Möglichkeit von Brückenprinzipien in der Natur- und Bioethik
ISBN 3-937202-06-4
208 pp., Hardcover € 58,00

8 Rafael Hüntelmann
Existenz und Modalität
Eine Studie zur Analytischen Modalontologie
ISBN 3-937202-07-2
189 pp., Hardcover € 58,00

9 Andreas Bächli / Klaus Petrus
Monism
ISBN 3-937202-19-6
340 pp., Hardcover € 70,00

10 Maria Elisabeth Reicher
Referenz, Quantifikation und ontologische Festlegung
ISBN 3-937202-39-0
ca. 300 pp., Hardcover € 89,00

11 Herbert Hochberg / Kevin Mulligan
Relations and Predicates
ISBN 3-937202-51-X
250 pp., Hardcover € 74,00

12 L. Nathan Oaklander
C. D. Broad's Ontology of Mind
ISBN 3-937202-97-8
105 pp., Hardcover € 39,00

13 Uwe Meixner
The Theory of Ontic Modalities
ISBN 3-938793-11-2
374 pages, Hardcover,€ 79,00

14 Donald W. Mertz
Realist Instance Ontology and its Logic
ISBN 3-938793-33-3
252 pp., Hardcover, EUR 79,00

15 N. Psarros / K. Schulte-Ostermann (Eds.)
Facets of Sociality
ISBN 3-938793-39-2
370 pp., Hardcover, EUR 98,00

ontos verlag EditedBy • HerbertHochberg • RafaelHüntelmann
ChristianKanzian • RichardSchantz • ErwinTegtmeier

ontos verlag NicholasRescher

Nicholas Rescher

Collected Paper. 14 Volumes

Nicholas Rescher is University Professor of Philosophy at the University of Pittsburgh where he also served for many years as Director of the *Center for Philosophy of Science*. He is a former president of the Eastern Division of the *American Philosophical Association*, and has also served as President of the *American Catholic Philosophical Association*, the *American Metaphysical Society*, the *American G. W. Leibniz Society*, and the *C. S. Peirce Society*. An honorary member of *Corpus Christi College*, Oxford, he has been elected to membership in the *European Academy of Arts and Sciences* (Academia Europaea), the *Institut International de Philosophie*, and several other learned academies. Having held visiting lectureships at Oxford, Constance, Salamanca, Munich, and Marburg, Professor Rescher has received seven honorary degrees from universities on three continents (2006 at the University of Helsinki). Author of some hundred books ranging over many areas of philosophy, over a dozen of them translated into other languages, he was awarded the Alexander von Humboldt Prize for Humanistic Scholarship in 1984.

ontos verlag has published a series of collected papers of Nicholas Rescher in three parts with altogether fourteen volumes, each of which will contain roughly ten chapters/essays (some new and some previously published in scholarly journals). The fourteen volumes would cover the following range of topics:

Volumes I - XIV

STUDIES IN 20TH CENTURY PHILOSOPHY
ISBN 3-937202-78-1 · 215 pp. Hardcover, EUR 75,00

STUDIES IN PRAGMATISM
ISBN 3-937202-79-X · 178 pp. Hardcover, EUR 69,00

STUDIES IN IDEALISM
ISBN 3-937202-80-3 · 191 pp. Hardcover, EUR 69,00

STUDIES IN PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY
ISBN 3-937202-81-1 · 206 pp. Hardcover, EUR 79,00

STUDIES IN COGNITIVE FINITUDE
ISBN 3-938793-00-7 . 118 pp. Hardcover, EUR 69,00

STUDIES IN SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY
ISBN 3-938793-01-5 . 195 pp. Hardcover, EUR 79,00

STUDIES IN PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY
ISBN 3-938793-02-3 . 165 pp. Hardcover, EUR 79,00

STUDIES IN VALUE THEORY
ISBN 3-938793-03-1 . 176 pp. Hardcover, EUR 79,00

STUDIES IN METAPHILOSOPHY
ISBN 3-938793-04-X . 221 pp. Hardcover, EUR 79,00

STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF LOGIC
ISBN 3-938793-19-8 . 178 pp. Hardcover, EUR 69,00

STUDIES IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE
ISBN 3-938793-20-1 . 273 pp. Hardcover, EUR 79,00

STUDIES IN METAPHYSICAL OPTIMALISM
ISBN 3-938793-21-X . 96 pp. Hardcover, EUR 49,00

STUDIES IN LEIBNIZ'S COSMOLOGY
ISBN 3-938793-22-8 . 229 pp. Hardcover, EUR 69,00

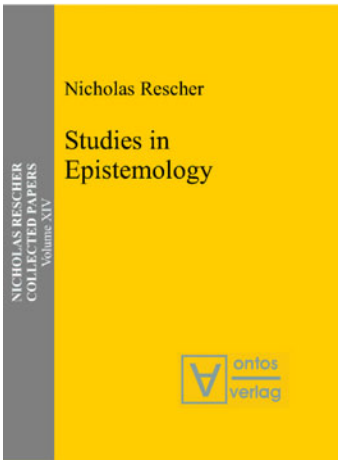
STUDIES IN EPISTEMOLOGY
ISBN 3-938793-23-6 . 180 pp. Hardcover, EUR 69,00

ontos verlag

Frankfurt ● Paris ● Lancaster ● New Brunswick

2006. 14 Volumes, Approx. 2630 pages.
Format 14,8 x 21 cm
Hardcover **EUR 798,00**
ISBN 10: 3-938793-25-2
Due October 2006

Please order free review copy from the publisher
Order form on the next page



ontos verlag

P.O. Box 1541 ● D-63133 Heusenstamm bei Frankfurt
www.ontosverlag.com ● info@ontosverlag.com
Tel. ++49-6104-66 57 33 ● Fax ++49-6104-66 57 34